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NEVER—FOR EVER.

BY

RUSSELL GRAY.

"If love be sweet, then bitter death must be;
If love be bitter, sweet is death to me."—TENNYSON.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



LONDON:
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TO

J. SHERIDAN LE FANU, ESQ.

THIS STORY IS INSCRIBED,

WITH MUCH REGARD AND ADMIRATION,

BY THE AUTHOR.

NEVER—FOR EVER.

CHAPTER I.

ON THE CLIFFS.

“AND so you really like this dull old place, with all its faults?”

Words spoken by a large, ungainly individual of the male sex, stretched full length on the stones and shingle of the Llanaber beach, at the feet of two muslin-clothed, mushroom-hatted young ladies. He chucked a stone into the water as he spoke, and watched the ripples rounding off into circles fainter and fainter on the still blue surface.

“Yes, I’m really growing quite fond of the old cliffs and ruins—aren’t you, Lily?” came from under one of the mushrooms. “I’m getting used to the dulness, beginning to feel as if I never could rouse my-

self from the lazy kind of life we have been leading for the last few weeks."

"Well, I don't know about that," replied the other mushroom; "I rather fancy I could rouse myself pretty quickly if there was anything worth rousing for—a good ball, for instance; but I'm afraid there's no chance of anything of that kind just at present, either here or anywhere else."

"Balls, balls, ever balls, Miss Fremantle. I don't believe you think of anything else in the world but balls—you're the gayest young lady I ever met."

Here the prostrate individual half-raised himself, and turned a very jolly, sun-burnt face towards the smallest and most coquettish of the mushroom hats.

"I don't believe I'm any gayer than most girls, that is, town girls; every one likes a ball, I'm sure."

The speaker's head was bent forward, so that all that was to be seen of the features under the shady hat was a rather large, well-shaped mouth, with full rosy lips, too fond, some people thought, of breaking into smiles—very natural smiles, however,

which disclosed two rows of very even white teeth, and made two dimples in two very soft cheeks, and just the tip of a white little nose turning slightly up; this was all that met the gaze of a pair of very admiring gray eyes, which were raised from the aforesaid jolly sunburnt face.

“No balls here at least,” he said, turning a rather amused glance down on the unpretending little village lying below among the green spreading fields and waving trees; “and yet there are some young ladies who contrive to live here from year’s end to year’s end, and never miss them.”

The red lips smiled, as if to say, “What very odd girls;” then there was another silence, another stone thrown, more circles dying away, and then the gray eyes were raised again; this time they were met and their gaze returned by two very large blue ones, long lashed, and wondering soft and deep, with that far-off look in them which seems to span the long, long years to come, and gaze into the dim sad future when their light shall be quenched and gone.

The gray eyes rested longer than was necessary, I think, on that soft-tinted, girlish face and big blue eyes, rested dreamily and a little sadly, and the owner sighed as he looked away.

“What makes you sigh so, Mr. Oke-don?” asked the red lips again. “You’re always sighing now.”

“I didn’t know I had got the habit,” he said; “but those kind of things grow upon people I believe—don’t you think so, Miss Agnes?”

This was addressed to the other mushroom, who had sat through that little conversation, and sighing and gazing very patiently, looking out over the blue sea in a very dreamy manner.

“Yes, I agree with you, things do grow upon people till they become habits; but if people have proper control over themselves they needn’t give way to such things.”

“Oh, here’s the old story of controlling minds and forming habits—and, in fact, making a martyr of one’s self,” cried the red lips. “You’re quite right to sigh, or groan, or do anything else you are

in the habit of doing. Don't control yourself, for goodness sake, Mr. Oke-don."

The long individual raised himself quite now into a sitting posture, and looked from one to the other of the mushroom hats undecidedly.

"I wonder which of you will be most interested in a piece of news I am going to tell you," he said.

"I, of course," cried Lily, laughing. "What is it?"

"Well, you know Dashwood, I suppose —Jack Dashwood?"

"No, I don't think so."

"Don't you? How odd! Why, I thought all the girls were mad about Jack. A very good sort of fellow he is —the best heavy-weight across country I ever met. He's in the — Dragoon Guards."

"Is he handsome?"

"Well, I suppose he is, or he wouldn't be such a favourite with ladies."

"What's he like?"

"Well, he's a big fellow, with very long moustachios—that's about all I can

say for him. I don't think him handsome, but you know ladies are always satisfied so as a fellow's got big black eyes and long moustachios, and is what they consider handsome—he may be the greatest fool, or scamp, or anything else, it doesn't matter."

He said it a little savagely—perhaps he knew he wasn't what ladies consider handsome. Only a strong man, with wide shoulders, no good features to boast of, too big a mouth with too small a fringing of moustache above it, two cheeks much too red, and sunburnt, and healthy-looking, to romance about. But I think he was mistaken, and that there were many girls who would have admired that strong figure of his—many girls who would have even thought him handsome—one who would have been content never to see another man again, if she might only have him all to herself—one who thought him the noblest, handsomest, and fairest of men—namely, that same Agnes, who sat there shady hatted, and with downcast eyes, poking the sand with her parasol. But how was he to know all this—

how was he to know that it only wanted those broad shoulders and kind gray eyes to make her the happiest woman living? I think if he had known it, he might have dropped down there and then on his knees, and left them at her disposal—was it well, or ill, I wonder, that he didn't?—well, I think.

“But you haven't told us the news, Mr. Okedon,” cried Lily. “What about this great lady-killer?”

“Well, he's coming to stop with me for a short time, I hope.”

“Oh, that's the news, is it—well, what's that to us, now?”

“Why, I suppose you'll see a good deal of him while he's here—that is, if you'll allow me to present him to you.”

“Oh, yes, certainly, I'm quite anxious to see him—when's he coming?”

“Well, I don't exactly know—I'll hear by the post to-morrow, I suppose.”

“Do you think he'll come soon?” said Agnes.

“How very curious you are about this great man—you're not going to fall in love with him already, are you?” and the gray

eyes turned once again on the mushroom hat inquiringly.

“I suppose I may if I like,” laughed Agnes, in answer.

He didn't answer. He was looking down moodily on the sand and blue water, and knocking two big stones together. Was he, I wonder, looking in a dream of the future over the quiet sea—was he thinking that perhaps it would have been better to leave that gallant hero, Captain John Dashwood alone, and not bring him among them just then.

They were all silent now. Miss Agnes, too, was looking down into the blue mirror, reading who knows what there; still poking at that everlasting hole in the sand, and the quiet waves came stealing up at their feet, over the stones and shingle; and the soft breeze stirred the ribbons on the mushroom hats and fluttered the muslin dresses this way and that.

Another half-hour and the two mushroom hats, accompanied by the big figure in the frieze coat, were wending their way slowly downwards towards a little cluster of houses below, along the cool cliffs and

sands ; along the scorched-up “ green,” which in consequence of a three weeks’ perpetual broiling, had become one with the sand-bank close by, and sloping down to the sea, lost itself there among the other sand and shingle ; along by the old moss-grown walls of the castle, past the rows of bathing-boxes and donkey chaises, and up to the corner house in the great stone terrace facing the sea. “ Good-bye,” from each of the mushrooms, and two dainty little hands are pressed by one large brown one, and then they disappear into their stone prison, and the gray frieze coat goes lounging off, to smoke a quiet cigar on the old boat over there, which has borne, bottom upwards, the waves and winds, “ the battle and the breeze,” for who knows how many seasons gone by, and which is just now, doubtless, very sticky and uncomfortable after the heat of the day ; but which, nevertheless, commands a very good view of the stone prison into which the two charming mushrooms have disappeared.

CHAPTER II.

A HEROINE.

OF course the young lady with the rosy lips and big blue eyes is to be the heroine of this little tale, you think, my reader. Well, Lily was no heroine; only a very foolish little girl, too fond of dress and admiration, too silly and thoughtless, not pretty enough, and wanting half the ingredients which are required to make a good heroine; that is to say, the heroine of a novel; for we have all our stories, let them be never so hum-drum and common-place; still, in our own estimation, ours is the great story of all, the most interesting to ourselves, the one over which we weep such genuine tears, and smile such pure, fond smiles. We are the heroes or heroines; our deeds, words, and thoughts are the most interesting,

are ever near us and with us to the end, when we all drift out together into the great sea of eternity ; the story told, the play acted ; the light gone out, yet leaving—oh ! let us hope !—some echo in some true heart, some remembrance of what we have done, and not what we have left undone.

No, Lily was only a heroine in the same sense that we all are so, only a heroine by circumstance, not by choice—a flower, withered too soon, because the sun couldn't always shine on it—a foolish, most imperfect little girl, with whom things never went right. So you must take her as she is, only a woman, after all ; and although there have been great women in the days gone by, they are scarcer now, and far less interesting ; their noble acts will never be recorded in the years to come, and their voices are too low and gentle to be heard above the strife and bustle in this wild world of ours.

She didn't look a bit like a heroine as she sat in the comfortable drawing-room of No. 1, Queen's Terrace, eating buttered

muffins, and drinking hot tea, a little later on that pleasant summer evening—not a bit like a heroine, with her happy rosy face, and great mass of fuzzy golden hair; and yet she was a very pretty little girl, wanting very little of being quite pretty enough for the heroine of a novel.

Agnes is there too, eating buttered muffins and drinking tea, and I think of the two she was the most like a heroine. Both girls are fair, both have that pretty peach colour in their cheeks, though Lily's is a little richer and deeper; both have rich golden coloured hair, though Lily's is always curly and fuzzy, and Agnes's smooth and soft and glossy; and yet, with so many points alike, they are as different as two girls can be. Lily, as she sits there rosy and smiling, a little Hebe, in her soft blue muslin dress, and happy dimples, is a strong contrast to that other face over there. There is a pensive soft look in it, a grave madonna-like shade there, undefined and sad, such a face as the gentle St. Agnes may have had. My young St. Agnes is not a per-

fect saint, she has much to learn yet, her martyrdom is still to come.

"We have kept you waiting, darling, I am afraid," said she, addressing a thin gray-haired elderly gentleman, in an arm-chair, who was scanning thoughtfully an old volume.

"No, dear, no; I forgot it was so late. Were you walking?"

"No, darling, only sitting on the beach; it was too hot to walk."

"Oh, yes," and the gray head was bent again over the interesting book.

"Papa?"

"Well, dear."

"Will you come into the castle after tea, later in the evening I mean, it looks so well by moonlight."

"If you like—yes, I think it does; how beautiful the mountains are; look over there, what a strange light there is over K——."

"Beautiful."

"I should like to live always here, in the quiet, with that beautiful view of sea and mountains always near me."

"Oh, darling, in winter?"

“Yes, I shouldn’t mind it in winter either. I’d sit and read by my fire.”

“How awful!” cried Lily, who had sat listening to this conversation with folded hands.

“Yes, for you, my poor little woman, but not for me ; I have had enough of the world, and nearly enough of life too, and what time I have left I should like to spend in peace.”

“Well, I should rather be buried at once than live here.”

“You don’t want rest, my child ; young minds never do, but old ones get a longing for peace ; it’s a merciful dispensation, makes people readier to die.”

They were silent, they never tried to argue those points now, it was an old battle, and had been fought and won a score of times before, so they eat their muffins in silence, while the leaves of the dusty volume turned over and over, and the urn hissed and sputtered, and the tea-cups rattled round Agnes, who did the honours at the head of the table.

“We met Charlie Okedon, papa,” ventured Lily again.

“Oh, indeed, you meet him very often, I think; he’s a nice young fellow, a very nice young fellow.”

“He must be very lonely, living up there all alone.”

“I wonder he doesn’t marry.”

There was another silence. Lily looked down on her plate, and swept the crumbs into rows and lines on the table cloth; and Agnes looked down, too, but there were no crumbs near her, so she had to keep her fingers to herself; and the unconscious gray head was bent once more.

“Will you come out now, pa? Have you finished your tea?”

“Yes, dear; I’ve finished long ago. I should like a walk very much.”

“Well, Aggie, come and get ready;” and there was a pattering of light feet up the stairs, and the sound of merry voices was wafted back to the ears of the gray-headed old man, who had closed his book now, and was looking out sadly on the green grass and sunset outside. His had been a handsome face, that was plain to be seen, grown very old-looking lately; the wrinkles were deepening round the

kind eyes, and the hair was growing whiter and whiter; but the two happy little girls who were upstairs wouldn't let themselves see those changes, wouldn't believe that their dear old father wasn't the same man he had been a short time ago; was growing nearer and nearer to that rest which he was longing for.

He had always been the same to them. He wasn't a father; he was something more. It was he who had been young with them long ago, played with them, and laughed with them; it was he still, and they wouldn't see the changes in that dear face; and so when they returned, mushroom-hatted and smiling, the sad old face brightening up looked fondly on them, and they saw only the light there, and not the shadow.

"Ready?" he asked, and then they strolled out into the soft light, a very loving little group, that gray-haired old man with his two pretty daughters clinging to him.

"Let us take a stroll up the cliffs first," said Lily, "and then into the castle a little later." 15

“Very well,” and they walked on slowly past the bathing-boxes and rows of donkey chaises, past the ivied walls, and up the winding path among the rocks and shingle. Here, by some most unaccountable chance, they came on a prostrate figure in a gray frieze coat, stretched full length upon the stones, smoking away at a cigar. He jumped up quickly as the little group approached, and raised his hat.

“Oh, how do you do, Okedon? Come out here to have a quiet smoke, I suppose,” inquired the elder gentleman, extending his hand. “How delightful it is up here.”

“Yes; I have been here a long time. I saw you coming up the hill, and I thought I’d be sure to meet you if I waited.”

This young hero of mine was a very straight-forward, honest man, he always spoke the truth bravely; but while he said these words, there came a deeper colour into his sunburnt cheeks, he had been waiting so long watching the stone house, so anxiously lying in wait.

“Let us walk on, then, a little higher, and by that time it will be time to visit our ruins.”

“Oh, you are going to the castle, then?”

“Yes; I wish to see it by moonlight, I am sure it will look particularly fine.”

So on they strolled, Lily still clinging to the old man, and Agnes and Charlie following behind.

“We are about the only people out here, I think. This is the great time for walking,” said Charlie.

“Yes; a long walk in this cool would be very pleasant.”

“I shall have a pleasant walk home over this hill to-night.”

“Yes.”

“How long do you think of staying here?” he asked again, after a pause.

“Well, I don’t know exactly; I hope some time.”

“I hope so too; I shall miss our walks and chats dreadfully.”

“You must be very lonely here sometimes?”

“Well, yes, sometimes, as you say; but

I generally get some fellows down to stay for the shooting, you know, and then I go up myself sometimes to town for a few weeks."

"Oh, yes, I see?"

"But when I am here I'm often very lonely."

There was a sadness in his hearty voice, which somehow smote on Aggie's heart. She looked up, but it was too dark to see well, and it was only the shadow of a big man that was at her side.

"You have some friends about here, I suppose?" she asked.

"Oh, yes, I know nearly every one. It's not a very extensive neighbourhood here, as you know. There are the Joneses—you know them, don't you?—the John Joneses—they live in your terrace, number seven: they're nice people enough, but they're away half the year. Then the Foulkeses—you know her, Lady Mary Foulkes—she's a jolly old woman; but that little Fanny, she's the greatest flirt I ever met."

"Oh, yes, I know her; they're in London now."

“I suppose they’ll be down here soon.

“There, the moon is quite above the trees now: how lovely it looks on the water!”

They paused, and stood side by side on the soft grass, looking away over the rippling waters, on which the moonlight fell in one wide clear stream; the tiny waves were stealing in among the rocks at their feet, and plashing and breaking against their stony sides.

“How calm and still it looks,” she said, “and how I like the sound of the waves on the stones and pebbles—don’t you?”

“Yes, it has a music of its own; it is a very pleasant sound.”

“I hope papa doesn’t forget his promise about the castle; I should like so much to see it in that beautiful light.”

He hadn’t forgot; and in a minute more they had all assembled at the top of the cliff hill, and were preparing to descend.

It was a very pleasant walk for Agnes; she had her young hero all to herself in the moonlight, and they had been talking very pleasantly all the way down the hill

and along the green, and she could see his gray eyes look down into hers once or twice with a very pleased look in them; and he, too, thought it a very pleasant walk, and sighed once or twice as he turned homewards alone, thinking of the lonely house he was going to, with a strange feeling in his heart—a feeling which he didn't quite understand, and which was new to him, and that soft low voice was ringing still in his ear, and mingling with the music of the creeping water down below.

Why is it that some voices will cling to us always, for ever mingling with the music of our lives, intruding themselves everywhere, sounding and blending with every song and sound, thrilling us and swelling our hearts with vain hopes, and regrets, ever near us in sorrow or joy, a note that must be in every chord—why is it, I wonder, that there are some voices that never grow old or still, some voices that can creep and steal into our hearts, and make themselves a place there for ever, whether we will or no?

My hero of the gray frieze coat couldn't

account to himself for the strange way in which that soft low voice which he had been listening to all the evening kept ringing and sounding still in his ear as he walked along that lonely road by the sea late that night—couldn't account for the strange way in which it seemed to blend with every sound and thought, and ring in every one of those breaking waves; but so it was, and so it will be always.

CHAPTER III.

A HERO.

THE morning rose again, sunny, bright, and scorching, as usual, and my hero of the gray frieze coat and wide-awake hat, namely, Charles Okedon, Esq., of Beaumanoir, Llanaber, Carnarvonshire, Wales, had sauntered down to the village, down the principal street, and up the steps of the "Sporting Hotel."

"The Bus not in yet, I suppose, Jones?"

"Not yet, sir; but she can't be long in coming now. Expecting some one, sir?"

"Yes, a gentleman."

"Maybe you'd step inside, sir?"

"No, no, thanks; I'll just wait here." And he sat down on one of the cross-benches constructed in the porch of the

hotel door, and having chucked away the stump of his used-up cigar, lit another, and provided himself with a newspaper, settled himself comfortably, with his hat pulled down over his eyes, to await the coming of the expected gentleman.

Tic, tic, tic, went the solemn old clock in the hall; puff, puff, puff, from the big mild cigar, and still no sign of the Bus. Had it, like the well-known sliding-picture in the magic lanterns of our youth, gone down holus bolus with its precious freight into the still blue water of the straits? No fear of that, I fancy—no fear of the strong iron chains and bars of the great Menai Bridge coming to grief under so small a weight as the Llanaber Bus. Charles Okedon felt no kind of anxiety about his missing friend; but the time fell heavily on his hands; the local newspaper contained no interest for him; he would take a stroll just as far—well, as far as the corner of the Green, the corner of the stone terrace, just to see if there was wind enough for a sail, that was all.

So once again the frieze coat and wide-awake were put under weigh, and pitched

and rolled down the street, past the rows of little houses, with their open doors and muslin curtains; past the two small unpretending towers which formed the entrance into that ivy-grown desolate old ruin, the castle, and on still a little further.

“Jolly the sea looks,” spoken in an admiring undertone by the individual with the cigar. Very jolly, indeed, it looked seen through the gap made by a sharp turn to the right, flanked on one side by the moss-covered castle wall, and on the other by the long stone side of that very eligible residence, No. 1, Queen’s Terrace; blue, blue sea, backed by tall blue mountains, crowned by a bluer sky, and studded here and there with little white specks, houses or cattle, might be either, to a casual observer, very indistinct and far off.

The lazy individual strolled on still further down past the corner house, on to the Green, on still till he reached the old boat, his favourite position. “Such a jolly view from just there,” he always said.

That depended a good deal, I should say, upon whether one sat facing the blue sea and mountains, and with one's back to the ugly stone terrace, or *vice versâ*, with one's back to the blue sea and one's face to the stone terrace; but I rather fancy Charles Okedon, Esq., did not care very particularly for good scenery, in fact, could scarcely have known the difference, as he far more frequently took up his position facing the stone houses and scorched Green, disregarding altogether the brilliant scene behind him.

"Confound those abominable Venetian blinds," was his first remark on looking on the scene before him, which was, as usual, the stony one. "What can be the use of keeping them down all the morning, I wonder?"

He sat down as he spoke on the old boat, and puff, puff, went the big cigar.

"I suppose I shall hear the Bus from here," he continued; "or even if I don't, it won't matter much: he'll find his way without me, I dare say."

He felt very cross and out of sorts.

"The sun was so awfully hot, and there

wasn't a breath of wind to cool one's face; hang it! he wouldn't sit there any longer gaping at those everlasting green blinds; the Bus must be in by now."

And so, more pitching and rolling, and the gray coat and wide-awake hat and cigar all disappeared by the castle wall, and round the corner.

"Why the d—— don't some of you take my traps in out of the dust and dirt, and bring them in here? and what the deuce is the good of telling me there's no way of bringing them up to the house? I say they must go. D——d if they won't. Haven't you got a wheelbarrow or something? I never was in such a hole in my life. Oh, Okedon, old fellow, is that you? Oh, all right; I was beginning to think I had made some cursed mistake, and got among a lot of savages, or something."

And a tall big man in a velveteen jacket and jerry hat held out a large brown hand to be shaken.

"How are you, Jack—how are you, old fellow? Oh, never mind the traps, they'll come up all right by-and-by. Come along,

we've only a ten minutes' walk from here; I thought you were never coming."

And the two men, arm-in-arm, walked leisurely down the street, and the disturbed waiters had time to collect their scattered thoughts and the captain's scattered luggage.

Twelve o'clock, and the Venetian blinds were raised now, and the windows were both open as wide as wide could be, so that the dazzling sun could shine full into the quiet drawing-room of No. 1, Queen's Terrace. It shone on two fair young heads which just appeared above the window-stool; one bent very low over an unseen book, and the other gazing with lazy eyes out on that perpetual view of sea and mountain.

"How hot it is, Aggie. I am sure we shall both get sunstrokes, if we sit here much longer.

"Yes, it's dreadfully hot."

"I declare I'm nearly mad. I don't know what on earth we shall do with ourselves all day. A walk would certainly be the death of me, and the rocks would be red hot. What shall we do?"

"We can play croquet in the castle; that would be just the thing."

"Oh yes, of course, everlasting croquet, and everlasting Charlie Okedon. I forgot. Yes, that will just do, and I, as usual, with two balls playing you two, and getting shamefully beaten."

"Well you know, Lily—"

"Oh yes, of course, I know, he'd much rather play with me; wouldn't he, dear?"

"I don't know, I'm sure."

"Oh, Aggie, Aggie, you're a very heartless young person, I think."

"Don't be foolish, Lily; you know as well as I do, that Mr. Okedon likes us both the same."

My pretty saint's cheeks were very hot and red, however, as she made this little speech; and there was a misty light in her soft gray eyes—a shadowy light, and she looked down quickly. Was it possible that my saint was in love—something quite new if so, and a trait I never heard of in the life of the blessed Agnes.

"Well, perhaps I'm mistaken; we shall see. But, good gracious, look, that isn't

—is it? No, it can't be—yes it is, though, the very Charles himself; and, oh, who on earth is the tall, nice looking man with him?"

"His friend, I suppose, the man he was telling us about yesterday."

"Oh yes, of course, open your book quick, Aggie, and be reading, and don't pretend to see them till they are quite close. I can watch them through the curtain, and tell you when to look up."

"Don't talk nonsense, Lily, of course they have seen us looking out," and Miss Agnes remained with closed book, and patient tranquillity, for the great event, while Lily, one minute behind the curtain, and one minute before it, was in a ferment of curiosity, waited and watched the movements of that most interesting individual, Captain John Dashwood, of Her Majesty's — Dragoon Guards, the great Adonis, and lady-killer, the tall, fashionably-equipped stranger who was lounging slowly down the Green in the direction of No. 1, Queen's Terrace.

"And those are the two little birds,

are they ; up there in their cage ? Let's have a look at them." Remark made by the gallant Captain, little knowing the anxiety with which the birds in the cage were waiting and watching for a nearer view of him. "I say, Charlie, couldn't you introduce us under the window ; you know it would be a deuced deal neater and less awkward for us all. Don't you think so ?"

The truth was, the Captain was growing a little nervous, "they were such uncommonly jolly little birds ; dash'd if they wern't."

"Do you think they'd come out for a sail or something ? Try 'em."

They were close under the window now, and the two little heads were bent devoutly over two unseen books. Suddenly one of the heads, the curly fuzzy one, was raised, and

"Oh, good morning," and "Aggie, Mr. Okedon," from a fluttered little bird, and then the other was raised, and then there were two little heads, with very pink cheeks and very bashful eyes.

"Will it be very rude if I present a

friend to you, Miss Fremantle? but I suppose I may. Captain Dashwood;" and here the gallant Captain raised his hat, and disclosed a very well-arranged, curly glossy head of nut-brown hair, two very fine soft brown eyes, which were looking supplicatingly up to the birds above, as if to say "don't be too hard on me; don't make me blush;" that was all they saw of him then, that and a pair of very long, well-twisted, and thick moustachios, and then the hat was replaced, and the nut-brown hair was hid, and a shadow was thrown over the fine soft eyes.

"Arn't you thinking of coming out this fine day, Miss Fremantle? I was just saying. 'How awfully jolly a sail would be;' you're fond of sailing, I suppose?"

The bold Captain had broken the ice, and was plunging and poking about, trying to find out how the land lay, and whether they were little game birds, or little geese; for, "Hang it," as he afterwards informed his friend, "a fellow has to talk differently to almost every girl he meets." This was a wrinkle for Charlie,

who was in the habit of talking very much in the same strain to every girl.

“Yes, I like sailing very much; but I hardly think there is wind enough this morning.”

“Oh, none at all,” broke in Charlie, “she wouldn’t move; but really aren’t you coming out?”

“Well, we were thinking of waiting till after luncheon, and then playing croquet, the day is so hot.”

“Croquet!—and where can one play croquet now—on the sandbank?” inquired the Captain rather disdainfully.

“Oh no, in the castle; haven’t you been into the castle yet?”

“Why no; this fellow, Charlie, wouldn’t do anything but dawdle up and down here in the sun all the morning; and so there’s a castle, is there; and who lives in the castle?”

“Oh, how sadly ignorant of the beauties of Llanaber you must be, Captain Dashwood? Why the castle is one of the finest old ruins in Wales; you ought to see it,” cried Lily.

“Well, I wish awfully you would come

out and explain all the beauties to me; it would be only a charity, for I can't get a word out of this fellow here; won't you come?" and the soft eyes with the shadow over them went up again in languid supplication.

"Oh, I don't think we can just yet, that is, I—"

"Well, suppose we split the difference, and you come out as soon as you can, and we can play a game of croquet on the castle walls, or in the castle drawing-rooms, or wherever you like; and you can teach me to play there, and then you can tell me all about the beauties of Llana-ber. Is that a bargain?"

"Well yes, I suppose so."

The Captain was very well pleased with himself; he had actually arrived at making bargains and extracting promises from the little birds on a ten minutes' acquaintance; he had settled the bill of fare for the afternoon, and could now go and play his game of billiards and smoke his cigar quietly and tranquilly, till the time arrived.

"Nothing like taking those sort of little

prudes by storm ; get them into a corner, and hang it if they don't surrender at once."

More wrinkles for Charlie, I hope he was listening, and trying to remember all the hints his kind friend was giving him as they walked the hill road, in the direction of Beaumanoir, which building was glowing down upon them from the nearest height, red-bricked, tall-chimneyed, and solemn looking.

"Isn't he handsome?" was the first remark made by Lily as the two figures sloped off.

"Yes, he's a fine-looking man, I must say," replied Aggie, looking after the two retreating gentlemen ; "a very fine-looking man."

The Captain's neat little bargain and happy arrangements for the afternoon were doomed to be disappointed. The perjured little birds, regardless of their promises, had actually levanted into a donkey shay, no one knew whither, and left the large hero of the velveteen coat to gnaw his moustachios, and think how "devilish cool they were."

“I never knew them go out in one of those things before. Where on earth can they have gone to? The bridge? they know some people there.”

The disconsolate Charlie was hinting a pursuit, I think, but the Captain had no idea of such nonsense.

“Hang it, he wouldn’t follow them; what the deuce did he care.”

And the two friends strolled on to the pier, and were both rather silent and absent, and though from time to time the Captain made some slight remarks, they were of rather an acrimonious nature, such as “how confoundedly hot it is;” and “hang it, it’s only four o’clock;” and “what the deuce shall we do with ourselves; we can’t stay mooning here all the day on this rotten old place;” “let’s play a game of billiards.”

And so the pier was abandoned, and a dull game of billiards dawdled over, the newspaper read and commented upon, and then the Captain bethought him of a good thing to be done.

“I say, Charlie, if you don’t mind, I think I’ll just dash off a line or two to

the old lady; it'll keep her quiet, you know."

And so, like a good boy and dutiful son, as he was, the Captain went up to the reading-room and penned a very good, neat little note, which began "My dear mother," and ended "Your very affectionate son, John Dashwood," which was duly posted, and travelled as quick as the mail-train would carry it up to the great metropolis, where next morning it appeared reposing on a very bright salver, awaiting the ordeal by touch.

"Any letters this morning, Tomkins?"

"Yes, my lady—one for your ladyship and one for Miss Dashwood."

"Oh, then, you may go, and, Tomkins, ring the bell again."

And her ladyship having proceeded to examine the letters, first the one directed "Miss Dashwood," which having turned this way and that and examined, she laid aside, with the remark, "dear, dear, when will Caroline cease making a fool of herself?" and then, with a sigh, addressed herself to the other, which, as we know, began, "My dear mother," and concluded

with "Your very affectionate son, John Dashwood," and was directed to "Lady Georgiana Dashwood, No. —, Park Lane, London."

"Wants more money, I suppose," was her ladyship's remark on taking up the big square envelope; she was agreeably surprised, however, when on reading the epistle through, from "my dear nother" to "your very affectionate son," she found it was only a kind, chatty little note from her naughty boy, who was quite well, and enjoying himself awfully, and hoped she had got rid of her bronchitis, and was all right again, which passages pleased the reader, as all mothers are pleased by prosy little scrawls and innocent bits of news from their scampish sons.

"Jack is certainly improved," murmured the relieved parent, "and really has some sense, if he would but show it in some decided move."

I think the decided move which her ladyship referred to, had something to say to a certain Miss Fanny Foulkes, for whom Lady Georgiana and the Misses Dashwood affected a very sincere friendship, and who,

I fancy, looked forward to the decided move with a strange fluttering sensation about her poor, little, bewildered heart.

Just then there was a rustling as of many silks on the stairs, and the tripping of hurrying feet, and presently there came sailing in, one, two, three young ladies, who each bestowed a dutiful kiss on the lean, parchment-coloured cheek which was turned to receive them, and then by one, by two, by three, they all took their places. There was Miss Dashwood, tall, and slight, and dark, with that tendency to stiffness so strongly developed in the elder lady, a little softened and mitigated, but much on the same pattern.

There was Miss Julia Dashwood also on the tall, stiff scale, but wanting many of the good points which were allotted to her elder sister, namely, two very fine soft, dark eyes, Jack's eyes over again; Jack's big, languid, supplicating eyes, which had done so much mischief in their day, and were destined to do so much more, a set of tolerably regular Grecian features, and a tall, slight, elegant figure, those were pretty nearly all her good points, and yet some

people thought them quite enough; one man had found them even too many for him; had felt the fire in those dark eyes burning into his very soul, and was wasting and dragging out his life in a vain dream, of which Caroline Dashwood was the heroine.

Then there came Georgiana, the youngest, “hopelessly plain and vulgar,” as her mother was wont to remark, who went by a series of nick-names in the family, such as “Pat” and “Toby,” which the “hopelessly plain” young person always acknowledged to and bore with a Christian spirit, and even sometimes was known to join in the general mirth which her appearance afforded to her relations; but there were moments in solitude when the lean awkward looking girl was very down-hearted about her personal appearance, when she looked and looked in the looking-glass—till her eyes were dim with tears, wondering if any one could ever love such an ugly vulgar little creature; wondering how it was, that, pinch them as she would, no bright soft colour would flood those thin white cheeks of hers, that, twist and pull as she

would, the clothes would never sit right on that ungainly figure.

Her ladyship, very wisely, chose to take no notice of her eldest daughter's little billetdoux. I think she rather quailed before that strong-minded young person, and avoided any open combat with her; if she chose to make a fool of herself, her ladyship and all the powers on earth could not prevent her doing so, and so the wise parent contented herself with simply forbidding the house to Mr. Arthur Miles, the wolf who had stolen into the fold, and had well-nigh carried off her pet lamb from under her very nose.

It had been a great blow to the ambitious old lady, when she had discovered that Caroline, the young lady for whom she had made such brilliant plans and schemes, her handsome daughter, who was to do such wonders for the family, to be such a fine lady with some, as yet unknown, handle to her name, and to pave the way to other noble houses for her younger sisters, that she, with all her good sense and gifts, was about to throw herself away on a "wretched beggarman." Here

was a situation for the bewildered mother, now or never the blow must be struck, and the monster, Miles, driven back defeated.

Now or never Caroline and she must engage in that long-deferred conflict which had been pending for so many months, out of which one or other must come a victor, leaving the other slain and vanquished on the field. There must be no halving of the matter here, no firing of pistols in the air, and shaking of hands after it.

No, it must be war—war to the death; and yet, with all these wise resolutions, there had been a firing in the air, and a shaking of hands—there had actually been a truce between the combatants, and Caroline had consented to wait, that was all—to wait sometime perhaps—and her ladyship had wisely left the rest to time, the healer of all wounds, and hardener of hearts.

“I have had a letter from Jack,” said her ladyship, proud of the unwonted honour, and in a very good humour; “he is enjoying himself down there; doesn’t say exactly what he is doing; shooting, I

suppose;" from which we infer that that dutiful young man had not seen fit to acquaint his affectionate parent with the existence of those jolly little birds.

"Oh, indeed," replied Caroline, who was deep in that mysterious epistle of hers.

"I'm sorry the Foulkes's haven't gone down as they intended this month, it would have been such a capital opportunity for Jack," continued the elder lady.

"Jack will never marry Fanny, I'm sure; he makes the greatest fun of her behind her back."

"I don't think he does, Caroline. I never heard him; and I hope to heaven that all my children arn't going to make fools and beggars of themselves. Jack is getting some sense now, I think."

The letters were folded up now, and ensconced in their owner's pockets, and the tea-drinking went on rapidly. Caroline hadn't seen fit to respond to that little protest of her mother's; and the other young ladies not being in the habit of making conversation for anybody, remained silent.

"I shall send out my cards for Wednes-

day," said her ladyship, sipping her tea.

There was another silence, and then the bold Caroline ventured a very foolish remark.

"Mamma?"

"Well, my dear."

"You'll give me a card for Arthur Miles, I suppose?"

"No, Caroline; certainly not."

"May I ask why?"

"Because I don't choose."

"Then I shall not come down on that evening."

"You'll come down if I choose to order you to."

"I shall not."

There was going to be a battle, that was plain, so the two meek young ladies at the other side of the table, rose hastily and left the room. Whether there was a battle or not remains matter of conjecture, as no one knew exactly how that odd conversation terminated; but half an hour afterwards, Caroline, very flushed and hot looking, ascended rapidly to her own room, where, locking the door, she remained closeted for the rest of the day.

CHAPTER IV.

LADY GEORGIANA "AT HOME."

"EVERYTHING serious is more or less ridiculous." "Gravity is the very essence of imposture;" and I quite agree with the sage philosopher in this his fine perception of the ludicrous in his pompous fellow-mortals. Poor human nature, how weak is all your fallen grandeur, how blind your self-esteem and love of opulence. Where are your eyes and ears, that you cannot see and hear the great lesson of mortality that is preaching all around you every day, preaching in the blade of grass "which to-day is, and to-morrow is cut down and cast into the oven;" preaching in the lily of the field, which Solomon in all his glory could not excel; preaching in your very selves, for doth not man walk in a vain shadow; but I am not going to moralize or preach the old sermon, "The fashion of this world passeth away." These are

stale subjects, my readers, written and commented upon a score of times by great men and good, long before I or my feeble speculations were dreamed of.

If ever there was a living illustration combining these two strange ingredients of gravity and imposture, Lady Georgiana Dashwood was that illustration; she was all an imposture—a grave pompous imposture—from the gorgeous auburn wig which crowned her aristocratic head, to the false heel on her ladyship's left shoe; all false, false teeth, false blushes, and who knows how much else false as well? I wonder how much of all that grandeur was real, and how much really false; for I fancy that fame had given art too much of praise for the brilliant piece of upholstery, which sat there resplendent in her purple and fine linen, and fine old family diamonds.

Oh, if that mischievous devil who rode the magic ride, with the wondering Don Cleophas, through the murky air over that city of mysteries, Madrid, that grateful bottle-imp who unroofed houses and palaces for the edification of his deliverer,

could have peeped into that sanctum, her ladyship's dressing-room, and let at least one of her fellow-mortals into the mysteries of her toilet—if, I say, that devil who saw so clearly the imposture always blending with the gravity, would have taken the writer of this tale for once on a midnight ride, how much of speculation might have been spared, and how quickly the truth revealed. But the days of bottle-imps are over, and there is no chance of the return of the cloven-footed person, not even when there is so great a mystery as her ladyship's complexion requiring an explanation.

There certainly was a great deal of art in her composition, and yet there was something of nature too, and what there was was good, and Lady Georgiana must have been handsome in her day, and very fine-looking; and though her naughty boy was wont to make most disrespectful jokes about the rouge, and unconscious remarks at breakfast, about how shamefully Lady Louisa this, and Lady Mary that, got herself up, and how easy it was to know ever so good a wig; still I think her ladyship thought he could not have known

how much he was saying, and fancied, rather wildly, that the Captain was quite innocent as regarded her particular falsities.

That young man, I dare say, never looked beyond the surface, and saw only the false blushes and auburn wig, and did not exactly know how much of that big heap of clothes and jewellery was his natural parent, and how much was kindly bestowed on him by various perfumers and hairdressers' mysterious bounty. But the Captain was fond of her nevertheless, in his own selfish way; and though he laughed at her little deceptions and hollow mockeries, I think he really felt kindlier to the weak-minded old woman than to any one else in the world as yet; for she had been very good to him in the days gone by, when that incorrigible young scamp had begun to sow his wild oats, which process had been going on slowly ever since.

She had wept over and paid large unaccountable bills; she had accepted his promises, and taken back to her faithful bosom her prodigal more than a dozen

times since the seed for that great harvest so long in coming had first been sown. She had shed tears of thankfulness and forgiveness over him, and had killed the fatted calf and rejoiced with him over and over again.

The whole Dashwood family, with the exception of Captain Jack, were all assembled in the well-illuminated drawing room, in the fashionable residence in Park Lane. All the Dashwoods, from the stately and stiff, but now beaming and gracious Lady Georgiana, down to the shy, ugly, awkward girl in the white frock, who was sitting very ill at ease on a big velvet-covered ottoman in the middle of the room, with the bright light of a dozen wax lights shining full on her pale face—a delicate, very sensitive face it was, with not one good feature in it, and yet at times looking almost beautiful in its earnest and strange melancholy.

All the Dashwoods, and a few friends to whom her ladyship was at home on this sultry July evening.

There were two or three venerable females, mostly stout, and with high

colours, and equipped like their hostess in purple and fine linen. There were countless young ladies, all pink-cheeked and snowy-necked; some short, some tall, some fat, some lean, who were chattering to, and beaming on countless young gentlemen; and there was that desperate little flirt, Miss Fanny Foulkes, sitting in a corner, as usual, with a big, hairy-faced man, who was murmuring, who knows what, into those pretty ears of hers, and trying to catch a glimpse of the saucy black eyes which were hid just now, by the long dark lashes, looking so much longer and darker as they rested on her pale, fair cheeks

“What a terrible flirt that little friend of yours is, Caroline!” said a languid young lady, reclining on an ottoman close by, and looking with lazy, half-contemptuous, half-envying eyes across at the dimly-lighted group in the corner.

“How she manages to get hold of a man and lead him off to some out-of-the-way place whenever she can; just look what eyes she is making at that foolish-looking creature she has got hold of now.

Who is he, Carrie? I never saw him before."

"That—oh, that's a Mr. Miles—a friend of ours," replied the discomfited Caroline.

The languid young lady perceived that she had put her foot in it, to use a vulgar phrase, for rumours of the "Miles' affair" had reached the ears of most of Miss Dashwood's friends and acquaintances; so she changed the subject as soon as possible, and was soon deeply engaged in the contemplation of a large photograph-book, lying close by, and apparently quite forgetful of the sly flirtation in the corner. The book was Caroline's, as that young lady informed her, and it contained more than one representative of that very Mr. Miles who was sitting so very close to the artless little creature over there, of whom there were also countless little effigies, all of them bewitchingly piquant, and naïve—all of them flashing very saucy glances at the gazer.

"She's a pretty little thing all the same, I suppose men would think her charmingly pretty." This was only a thought which

passed through the languid young lady's mind, as she closed the book, not spoken or even muttered, as Miss Dashwood was sitting moodily by her side, and would inevitably have overheard her soliloquy.

Miles, the faithless Miles, was, I think, not very happy in his envied position : he was a mild individual, not given to flirting, not given much to making eyes, save at one woman, or saying pretty things to any but that one favoured female, and he didn't quite understand the point of several very odd speeches which had been made to him within the last few minutes, by the pale-faced companion of his solitude ; didn't quite know what to make of one or two odd looks and glances from those saucy black eyes, and was looking down on the drooping lids and bands of glossy black hair, more in amazement than admiration, when he caught the eye of his injured Dulcinea flashing a thousand times brighter under the light of the gas lamps over her head, flashing very palpable reproaches at the much distressed Arthur, who sat there rebuked and awe-struck, not knowing what to do.

Lady Georgiana rather enjoyed the scene of Miles's desertion, as she sat there, with her diamonds flashing above her watchful eyes, rather stern and resentful now, as she saw the culprit creeping back to his injured one; and the diamonds flashed this way and that, and shot fierce lightnings after the faithless Paris, as he sloped over towards the desolate Cœnone, who had waited very patiently, the watcher thought, had kept her sorrows to herself. Though, to be sure, I don't suppose that even the frantic victim to fair evil-hearted Paris's charms would, if seated in a London drawing-room, have lamented, and confided in the furniture, before a tolerable audience of—

“Fair women and brave men,”

as we know she did to the rocks and waters and trees, in that valley of Ida where he had wooed and won her.

Bright and ominous flashes were following the unconscious couple from the watchful eyes of the disappointed parent, who sat with the air of a Roxana, with her glances and lightnings and queen-like scorn, all

going for nothing, for the tale was altered, and Paris, the deceiver, was a changed person, was very humble and awkward and penitent; and C  none, the desolate one, who had been dying of her love, of her blighted hopes, was on her high horse, and riding it very well, the bewildered old lady had to confess to herself.

Some one translates the word *ennui* "entertaining people," and "doing the honours." I think my hostess found it so, for she had no time to spare in darting withering glances or laying trains of gunpowder under unsuspecting feet; it was she who handed over the obedient Miles to the enemy, and ordered him to take her in to tea, well knowing that the black-eyed siren would do her best to charm and enslave him. But it had all failed, and Paris had fled from the black-eyed Venus on whom he had been forced to bestow the golden apple, had fled and left her sitting there alone in the shade, and was just now bending very low over the angry head of his injured C  none, and whispering vehemently, while that lady, with rather a troubled countenance, and

with two very red spots on her fair cheeks, was listening rather impatiently, tapping the ground with her slender foot, and twitching nervously at her fan.

“Don’t you believe me, Caroline? I think you are too hard on me, I do indeed. I don’t think I ever gave you cause for jealousy yet.”

“I’m not jealous, I assure you; far from it, I admire your good taste immensely; I think she’s very pretty indeed.”

“My taste! I think you know my taste by this time, and—and I think you’re very unjust to me, Caroline, I do, indeed.”

The mild young man was growing rather irritated: it wasn’t fair, all that fuss for nothing; she had sat and talked, and perhaps flirted, too, for all he knew, under his very nose, a score of times at least, and yet he had never upbraided her, and he felt rather angry—as angry, indeed, as such a mild creature could feel.

“You needn’t blaze out about it,” she said; “let us forget it all. I don’t sup-

pose you meant to look as devoted and affectionate as you did, but people are carried away by those sort of things, I know; and though it did put me in rather a disagreeable position, considering that mamma and all the girls were looking on, and I suppose thinking what a fool I was ever to believe in such a desperate flirt—still it doesn't matter at all, I'm quite indifferent."

"Well, you know——"

"Oh, yes, I know, of course; but let us go into the next room; some one is going to sing, I think, and as I don't care for sitting in corners all the evening, and as you have had your share of that kind of amusement, I think we might as well join the others; it's much pleasanter talking pleasantly to people, than nagging and fighting about nothing."

"I didn't mean to nag or fight either, I'm sure."

And the disconsolate young man with the long whiskers followed rather sheepishly in the wake of the tall young lady in white silk and snowy neck, who led the way solemnly to the piano.

"Are you going to sing, Miss Dashwood?" asked a cheery stout gentleman, with very glossy dark hair and moustachios, who had been hovering about butterfly fashion, lighting now on one flower, now on another, restless and flippant, with a ready laugh, and merry eye.

"Sing? oh, dear, no; I never sing; but my sister is going to, I think."

"Your sister? Is that your sister sitting over there on the ottoman by herself?"

"Yes, that's my youngest sister."

"Not out yet, I suppose?"

And the merry eye was turned with a quizzical glance at the solitary little figure sitting under the chandelier.

"No, oh no; she's not out yet."

"And she sings, does she?"

"Yes."

"Well?"

"Well, yes, I think so; she has a sweet voice, and practices a good deal."

"Is she going to sing now, I wonder? I feel curious to hear the performance."

"Yes, I'll tell her."

And the tall figure in the rich white silk, followed by the stout gentleman, swept across to the lonely little girl on the ottoman.

“Georgie, Mr. Foulkes wishes to hear you sing. Would you mind, dear? Mr. Foulkes, this is my sister.”

And the stout gentleman executed a very polite salaam before the dowdy little white dress and pale drooping face.

“Yes, I’m very anxious to hear you sing, Miss Dashwood; it will be a great kindness if you will.”

“Oh, certainly, yes. What shall I sing, Carrie?”

“Oh, anything you like, dear.”

“‘L’Addio;’ will that do?”

“Yes, or anything else you like; only be quick about it.”

The little figure glided over to the piano, and turned over some music.

“This, I think; I like this one.”

And she held out the piece to Mr. Foulkes, who had followed.

“‘Che faro!’ Oh, yes, very pretty. I know it. Yes, if you please.”

The preparatory chords were struck,

and then the passionate words "Sposa Euridice," sounding rich and full in a sweet, clear voice, rang out above the murmur of voices and clattering of tea-cups in the next room.

He looked down on the pale face and parted lips from which the tones were swelling down on a strange melancholy little face and big wild eyes with a passionate light in them, unconscious of his earnest gaze, unconscious of the whispered approbation in many low voices, unconscious of all save the soul-stirring spirit of the song, and the "Che faro, do ve andro," had a new sound in them, a new, wild melancholy sound, which the stout gentleman felt stealing into his heart, and stirring it somehow in a way he could not understand; and very heartily he thanked the singer, when, the song concluded, she rose to retreat.

"You have given me great pleasure," he said—"very great pleasure. I didn't believe there was half so much soul in that song till I heard you sing it just now. I am surprised, really surprised."

She looked up into his kind face with a

very grateful look. She was not accustomed to praise, and the honest tones of the speaker pleased her.

"I'm glad you liked it," she said. "I like the song myself, too."

It wasn't the same face that was turned to his now. The strange passionate look was gone out of it; the wild speaking light in the big dark eyes was gone, too, and it was only a rather sad-looking face, with timid eyes, there before him.

"Do you paint or draw?" he asked.

"I draw; yes, a little; but I can't paint. How I wish I could! I never see those fine old pictures, the grand old pre-Raphaelite things, that I don't long to be a painter—a regular painter, I mean."

"I never heard of a young lady painter—a regular painter, as you call it."

"No; I daresay not; but I'd gladly give up being a young lady if I might choose between the two."

"Well, I never met a young lady before who wished not to be a young lady."

“Didn’t you ? I often wish it. I fancy if I was a man, I could make so much more of my life—enjoy myself so much more if I had something to do.”

“Well, and haven’t young ladies something to do ? Isn’t singing something for instance ?”

“Oh, singing is only amusing oneself. I mean something in which one might take an interest—the completion of some great work—a great painting, for instance. Don’t you think so ?”

“Well, I’m rather averse to active labour myself ; and as I never undertook any very great work, I can’t say how I might feel about its completion, but, I fancy, thankful ; but you’re an enthusiast, I see.”

“No, no ; not in the least ; now you mistake me. I’m only an enthusiast about pictures, and that without being in the least a judge of them. I only know the ones I like, the ones that please myself, the ones I should like to have painted, that’s all.”

“Oh, I see ; but I fancied either you or one of your sisters painted, there seem to

be such a quantity of water colours, and others about the rooms, pretty ones, too. That seems to be a good one up there over your head; let's see," and he adjusted his eye-glass, and prepared to inspect it.

"That—oh, that's the burial of 'The Cenci'; it's one of my favourites; isn't she lovely, with her sad face and long hair?"

"Yes—it's very fine, very beautiful."

"You're a judge of paintings, then! I never knew whether that one was good or not; I only knew that I thought it very fine."

"Well, you were right there, it is fine—very fine."

"Jack bought it somewhere abroad, last year. You know Jack, don't you, my brother?"

"No, I've never met him; I've often heard my mother and sister speak of him, though; he's not at home now, I suppose?"

"No; he's staying with a friend in Wales."

"Oh, indeed! what part of Wales?"

“Carnarvonshire; Llanaber’s the name of the village.”

“Oh, Llanaber? why, that’s close to us, you know—our post-town, in fact; and who is he staying with there, if it’s not rude to ask so many questions?”

“He’s with a Mr. Okedon; I dare say you know him; he lives there.”

“Yes, of course; a very good fellow, too; and he knows him, does he?”

“Yes, they were schoolfellows together.”

“Well, I’m going down there in a day or two, so I suppose I shall be likely to meet him.”

“Georgie, where is your music? Fanny is going to see if she can find something she knows,” interrupted Caroline.

“Oh, here it is,” and the little dowdy girl who had somehow forgotten her bashfulness, was called back from the dream of pictures and music into which a cheery voice had led her, to the dazzling lights and sound of gay voices around. Miss Foulkes sang a very spirited ditty, with great execution, and then there was a flitting of “fair women and brave men;” and

finally, Lady Georgiana was left alone with her daughters in her well-lit drawing-room, to talk over and pick to pieces her departed guests.

CHAPTER V.

CROSS PURPOSES.

WE must now return to our little country mice and hear how they are getting on, and what progress the gallant Captain is making with those little prudes.

The old church clock was pointing its long worn fingers to the figure V, and the voice of time, the old, old song, "For ever—never, never, for ever," was ringing and floating away over the green grass mounds in the quiet churchyard below, over the tiles and slates in the village streets, over the sounds of talking and laughing, and children's play, over the green old ivied walls of the castle, above the voices of the croquet players there, and on, still on.

"Follow me," and the echoes repeat the words cried in a laughing voice.

“Follow you! why of course I will, wherever you like to lead me all over the world.”

And echo answers “over the world.”

“Now, Captain Dashwood, you are sure to get into a scrape if you follow her. Leave her alone and stay where you are,” and “don’t spare her; she’s very dangerous.” “Send him away, or he’ll ruin us.” “Strike her, strike her,” and such like strange remarks were being wafted from the croquet ground, where two mushroom-hatted young ladies, and two muscular-looking young gentlemen—one in a gray frieze coat and wide-awake hat, and the other in a velveteen garment, and with very long thick moustachios, from which appendages he seemed to derive inspiration on various mysterious occasions, by a chewing and gnawing process—were playing.

The gallant Captain was getting on capitally with his new friends. He had only known them a week, to be sure, but then, “if a fellow knows what he’s about, he can do a great deal in even that short time.” He and Miss Lily were very good friends indeed, and the soft dark eyes had

got into a habit of always looking into the big blue ones for advice or encouragement on any serious occasion like the present.

“Leave me here and go on your own way,” was the sage advice which blue eyes gave to brown ones, and which brown ones answered by one of those supplicating glances which seemed to be almost a part of them.

They were very good friends indeed—very, very good friends, and my little heroine had grown to like the sight of the velveteen coat lounging down the Green, and I am afraid had looked once too often into the depths of those dark eyes.

The game was ended. The Captain and his little partner, beaten shamefully, were laughing over their defeat.

“I’ll never play with you again—never, Captain Dashwood—you’re the worst player I ever met, and—”

“Well, don’t scold me now; you know it was all your fault. You would talk and laugh, and turn my head, and I couldn’t mind the game, you know. Could I?”

When was a woman angry at being told

that she was the cause of any fault, let it be never so great, when the accuser is a fine handsome fellow? Why, even the desolate Lady Anne, full of wrath and sorrow, could not be too hard on the humpbacked villain of history. Had he not killed all who were nearest and dearest to her, and yet was he not forgiven? *She* had been the cause of his transgression, *her* charms had fired him to the act, and that was enough for her—quite excuse enough for the vain young woman, and so that little slip of his was pardoned and forgotten.

And Lily only laughed as she looked into the contrite face.

They were standing together close to the old ivy-grown wall, and the Captain was smiling, too, as he looked down on the little figure at his side—looked down with those dark, passionate eyes of his on the innocent girlish face and soft blue eyes. He was leaning lazily against the wall, and carefully dissecting a big ivy leaf, as he said—

“Have you any belief in omens or old sayings?”

“Yes, every belief—I’m frightfully superstitious,” and she laughed again, as she looked down.

“Well, look here, isn’t this odd?—I’ve been counting the points on three of these leaves, and every one of them have said ‘never.’

“Why, what do you mean?”

“Why, look here: this year, next year, never; this year, next year, never,” and he touched the little points slowly as he spoke.

“I don’t understand; what’s the meaning of it?”

“Why, bless my soul! I thought every young lady understood that. Well, here it is over again:—she loves me very much, a little, not at all; very much, a little, not at all; do you see, not at all,” and he looked down again on the upturned face.

“Oh, I see now; that’s very good.”

“Very bad, I should say.”

“Why?”

“Why, because she doesn’t love me, and it’s never to be.”

“Oh, I see,” and Lily laughed again.

“What a heartless young lady you are,” he said, tearing up the leaf as he spoke—
“actually laughing at my disappointment.”

“Why, I didn’t know you were disappointed.”

“Of course I was. I thought that even if it wasn’t very much, it might have been just a little; but not at all. That’s very hard, isn’t it?”

“Yes, very hard, indeed,” she answered, laughing; “but I don’t suppose it will break your heart.”

He looked down again on the little figure beside him, the demure little figure, which was somehow growing very familiar to him, had been a good deal in his thoughts lately, and something prompted him to say, “I wonder what you think of me, Miss Lily.” It was the first time she had heard her name pronounced in those deep, soft tones, and a strange thrill of pleasure ran through her, but the next minute she recollected herself. Captain Dashwood, whom she had only known a week—that strange gentleman by her side—had just called her by her Christian name, and was even now gazing down on her flushed

cheeks, and wanting to know what she thought of him. Thump, thump, went the little heart, and then the deep voice spoke again. "I suppose you think me a great fool, and perhaps a flirt, too."

"I think most men are flirts. I haven't had time to think anything in particular about you, Captain Dashwood, and—"

"I wish I could make you think about me," he said, but she was gone. The timid little bird had escaped from the net and was sheltering beneath the wings of those two very sensible persons, Mr. Charlie Okedon and Miss Fremantle, who had not been strolling about, and talking nonsense, but were employed in a much better manner, tying up mallets and sticks, and tugging at sundry semicircles which, from some unseen attraction, refused to be extracted from the hard earth.

"It's time to go in, I think, Aggie; are you coming?" and the fluttered little bird clung close to her unconscious sister all the way home.

"Good-bye," once more, in the low soft voice, and she fancied there was

reproach in the tones; but she wouldn't look up, she wouldn't be made a fool of, and so this very discreet young person tripped up the stone steps and disappeared.

"What a d—d fool I am!" was the Captain's self-estimate, as he and Charlie turned off in the direction of the red brick house. "What a d—d idiot, to be trying on any of that sort of thing with her. She's too nice, a great deal too nice, for it is the nicest little thing I ever met, by Jove, and the prettiest, too." Here the soliloquy was interrupted by his companion, who, seeing the Captain moody and absent, attributed those symptoms to the want of a fresh cigar.

"Have a weed, Jack?"

The moody individual helped himself, and while the preparations for ignition were going on, found the string of his tongue loosed, and spoke as follows:—

"How long have you known those girls, Okedon?"

"Well, about six or seven weeks, not more."

"You seem to get on capitally with

them for so short an acquaintance, don't you?"

"Well, yes, I hope so; they're jolly girls. Don't you think so?"

"Oh yes, awfully jolly, but a little touchy I should imagine."

"Touchy, oh, dear no, the best tempered girls I ever met."

"Oh, yes, I dare say; I didn't mean that; I only meant a little—a little—" The Captain didn't know what he meant, I think; but his kind young friend helped him with—

"A little stiff, perhaps you mean."

"Well yes, I think so."

"I don't think they are—they never are to me."

They walked on in silence for a few minutes more, and then the Captain spoke again.

"I say, Charlie, I suppose it's all right with you and that other one?"

"All right! how do you mean?" and a very girlish rich blush, suffused the sun-burnt cheeks.

"Why I suppose it's to be, isn't it?"

"Hang it, don't be a fool, Jack;" more

blushes, and the big figure, pitched this way and that, trying to look as if he didn't care, but making a sad hash of it nevertheless, and looking very much put out indeed."

"Well, I don't know," continued the Captain. "I rather thought you seemed to like each other very well indeed, but I suppose you know best; and about the other, the little one you know; do you think there's anyone after her?"

"I don't know I'm sure, there may be."

Another silence which carried them as far as the little lodge and old-fashioned gate, appertaining to the red brick house.

"You're not crusty with me, for saying it, old fellow, are you?" inquired the Captain, passing his arm through that of his friend.

"Angry, oh no, not a bit, my dear fellow, but I'm glad you mentioned it; and I think perhaps I have been going there, and walking about with them, a little too often, and—and—I'll keep away for a few days, and not keep hanging



about them so much ; that will be better, don't you think ?”

The Captain had overshot his mark ; that would never do at all. Keep away indeed, and how the deuce was he to make up his little quarrel of to-day ? Here was a nice kettle of fish ; keep away indeed—very pleasant that.

“But I say, Okedon, what is to prevent you marrying her ? she's one of the nicest girls I ever met, and here you are with a nice house and place to bring her into, and five or six thousand a year to keep the pot boiling, and no one on earth to say you nay.”

“Except, perhaps, the young lady herself,” laughed obdurate young Charles. “No, no, my dear fellow, it'll never do ; I tell you I have been sounding her a little, and—and—I think she must like some one else.”

Here was more fish in the kettle. He had been sounding too, had he, and hadn't got much by it either. Well they must both begin over again, that was pretty clear, and the Captain, with this good resolve, began to cheer his friend about it.

“Well there’s no good hanging back, you know, and dash it, ‘faint heart never won fair lady’—isn’t it so?—so you must try your luck, old fellow; and fancy how much happier you would be with a good little wife to take care of you, and look after things for you, and make your grog of an evening.”

My big hero had rather selfish ideas of matrimony, and his perfect wife was rather odd, had accomplishments, and activity, and long-suffering, unheard of in any woman as yet born into this frail world of ours; but the picture of domestic bliss which he had just drawn for his friend’s approval, pleased the faint-hearted young man very well. He didn’t want anyone to take care of him, he could do that for himself, he thought, but he did want some one to cheer up the old place, and look after things a little. He had lived alone long enough to have grown tolerably used to the solitude of the big old rooms in the brick house; and yet at times the stillness and emptiness of them filled him with a strange wonder. Was he always to be alone in this great

thronged world—always alone in his big rooms, and lands? and yet was it not his own fault—were there not many young ladies who would have been very proud to reign mistress of those wide lands, and keep things straight for the big foolish young man, who could not realize so much bliss to himself, and I fancy was only waiting for some young lady to propose for him.

“Just wait a bit, and see if there really is some one, which I am sure there’s not, and then go in and win;” and the two young men arm-in-arm, paced slowly up the long winding avenue under the arches of green beech trees, which were rustling and whispering over their heads, and out into the open space before the house.

“Yes; I’ll think about it—I will indeed; and I think you’re right, Jack; there’s nothing like time, is there?”

“Well, yes, if you are not sure of your game; but I really think it is a devilish deal better to let her know a little, you know—just to let her see you like her, and admire her, and all that kind of thing; in fact, to pave the way.”

I think, considering how very badly his own paving process has been begun, the Captain might have kept his hints for himself; but he was very fond of giving his opinion, particularly where ladies were concerned, and it was one of his great boasts that he could tell at a glance what any girl was made of.

“And—and shall we go to see them tomorrow or not?” inquired the timorous youth.

“Of course we will, and we’ll play another game of croquet, or stroll about the place somewhere, and you’ll begin your pretty speeches and see how they pay.”

So, having settled their plans, these two gentlemen turned into the house in a very contented manner. Truth to say, poor Charlie had some misgivings as to his prowess as a lover, but he contented himself with thinking that Jack knew so much better how to get on with girls, and must be right.

Another week was gone; another hot sunny week, and Lily and Jack had forgotten their little quarrel. He had been so sorrowful and penitent in his manner, that she had not found it in her heart to

be cold and stiff with him for very long, and they were as good friends as ever now; better I think, for they understood each other. She wasn't a bit of a flirt, that was quite plain; and he—well she had never been quite clear as to the meaning of that little gush of tenderness among the ruins, but he was very penitent, and that was enough. But Charlie, the faint-hearted, was hanging back still, hanging back so much within the last few days, that the Captain was several times very much discomposed and irritated by the "fool," as he mentally termed him, taking up his post by Miss Lily's side, and leaving the irate individual with the long moustachios to entertain the deserted Agnes.

"What the d—l is he at?" muttered the discomfited Captain, when just as they were going for a nice long walk in the woods, Mr. Charles Okedon stepped up to the unconscious Lily, and said with a boldness quite new to him—

"May I walk with you, Miss Fremantle, as far as the wood? I want to tell you of a little plan I have been thinking about—the yacht, you know; I was thinking it

might be very nice to—to make an expedition, just a day—and—shall we walk on, and I can tell you all about it ”

Lily, with wondering eyes, and wondering heart, not knowing what to make of the proposition, and wishing the yacht and its owner at the bottom of the Red Sea, had nothing for it but to comply, and walked on very disconsolately ; while the Captain, in duty bound, had to wait behind attending on the forlorn maiden, champing and kicking the stones before him on the foot-path.

“ What can’t be cured must be endured ;” but the walk to the wood seemed almost interminable, the ascent up the gentle hill under the arches of trees, was dreadfully long and fatiguing, and the wood seemed to be running away from them. “ The fool ” was talking very volubly to Miss Lily, and was looking rather heated and excited, and indicating with his stick various localities on the opposite side of the straits.

“ Don’t you see,” he was saying, “ we might run in there, taking the tide down—it would serve nicely just then—and

catch the train, and arrive here somewhere about nine or ten o'clock; do you think Mr. Fremantle would come?"

"Oh, I think so; you can ask him, that would be better, and it would be very pleasant, very."

"We might go to-morrow, if you liked, there's nothing to prevent it; the yacht is there, you know, and all right; and what do you say—shall I ask him this evening after our walk?"

"Well, yes, I think so; I'm sure he'll come if you ask him."

"Very well, I will; and—and—shall we tell your sister—will you, or shall I?"

"Oh, you can tell her. Aggie, we have been arranging such a delightful excursion. Now, Mr. Okedon, tell her. I forget the beginning."

They had shuffled right, and Mr. Charles Okedon was with Miss Agnes now, and talking very volubly to her too; and the whole scheme was repeated over again, and the tides, and winds, and trains, all called into action, and Agnes seemed to approve the plans, and thought with Lily, "it would be very pleasant, delightful in fact."

"Has he been telling you about his great idea?" asked the Captain, when he took his place beside Lily.

"Yes, and I think it will be very pleasant; don't you?"

"Oh yes, I dare say—I hope so at least."

"Why are you so doubtful about it, Captain Dashwood? I think, unless it rains all day, or does something equally disgusting, which I don't see any probability of, we are sure to have a pleasant day."

"Well the pleasantness or unpleasantness of the expedition, depends very much on one thing, for me at least."

"And what is that one thing?" asked Lily, recklessly—forgetting, I am sure, what a very plain-spoken person the Captain was.

"Well, I don't know what you'll think of me for saying it, Miss Lily, but if you are with me, beside me I mean, I shall be quite happy, whether it rains, or no."

She couldn't run away here, he knew that I think, but she looked very much as if she would have liked to.

“I don’t see what my being there, or not, can have to say to it,” she said. “I don’t know whether I shall go or not now.”

“There, I knew you would be angry. I’m always saying something wrong, and you either won’t or can’t understand that I always mean what I say ; I swear I do. Won’t you believe me?”

She knew he was looking down upon her with those big eyes of his, those eyes that were beginning to have such a beautiful light for her ; but she didn’t look up, she was a very discreet little person, and didn’t half like those tender speeches, though they were very sweet to her ears, and she only said—

“Well I don’t like it, and I hope you’ll try and remember that?”

“I’ll remember anything you like ; will that do?”

She made him no answer, they had reached the top of the hill, reached the little wooden gate which led into the Beaumanoir woods ; he opened it for her to pass in, and then followed.

“How jolly it is here ! I never was here before. Where does this path lead to?”

“Down by the mill, the old mill we passed yesterday, close to the back gate of Beaumanoir.”

“Oh yes, I remember. What a lucky fellow Okedon is, with such a fine place and house; I envy him awfully. I suppose, now, he might marry almost anyone he liked. Lucky dog!”

Lily was silent; she didn't know what to say exactly without treading on dangerous ground. So they walked on, still under the tall waving trees, with glimpses of the blue sea and far off mountains, seen through a network of summer leaves; walked on in a dream through those green pines and elms, with the humming of bees and insects, and the breath of wild flowers round them.

“Why there's papa!” cried Lily, as a turn in the walk brought them within view of a rustic summer seat, where Mr. Fremantle was reposing his weary limbs after a toilsome ascent of the hill; Charlie and Agnes were drawn up before him, and as Lily and her companion came up, they found that the question of the yachting expedition had been broached, and Mr.

Fremantle was listening to Charlie's proposition of sailing down to Carnarvon in the yacht, and taking the train back to A——, and driving from there back to Llanaber in the evening, with very willing ears.

"Well that's all settled, I hope," said Charlie. "We shall start about ten, I suppose?"

And so, everything having been arranged to the satisfaction of everybody, the party turned homewards, all sadly jumbled together—Mr. Fremantle and Captain Dashwood, at the head, and Lily and Charlie close behind, Aggie bringing up the rear a long way off. This said Charlie was a sad fool to-day, he had been knocking about under everybody's feet, walking and talking with everyone but the right person.

"It will be devilish nice if he goes on this way to-morrow," thought the Captain, who was looking forward to the nice long walk down the hill with very much the same amiable feelings with which he had looked forward to the interminable ascent of the same a short time since.

“Do you intend staying much longer at Llanaber, Captain Dashwood?” inquired his companion.

“Well, I don’t know exactly. Okedon wants me to stay another fortnight, but I don’t think I can manage it.”

The Captain was not in a talking humour; he felt unequal to a long prosy conversation with a stupid old man, and so lapsed into a sulky silence. Mr. Fremantle afterwards informed his daughters that Captain Dashwood was a regular fool, he hadn’t an idea in his head, and couldn’t even discuss the most commonplace subjects. Whether the young ladies agreed with their parent on the subject, I can’t say, as they maintained a grave silence.

Down the long shady lane they tramped, and out on to the flat road at last, along by the shingle and stones, and old skeletons of boats, and at last the stone walls of Queen’s Terrace cast a shadow over their dusty coats and boots, and sour faces. The walk had not been a successful one, none of them had enjoyed it, and there was a very gloomy leave-taking under the



porch, and the two gentlemen turned off homewards, while the two young ladies scaled the stairs of the stone house with very slow steps, and reached their room, each in a very bad temper, which Lily showed by flinging a harmless little mushroom hat under her wash-hand stand, and then kicking it back again to the door, where it remained, very dusty and out of shape.

“How hot it is!” cried she, pushing back the heavy weight of hair from her forehead. “It’s beyond everything.”

“I’m not particularly hot,” answered Agnes, who, truth to say, looked very cool and self-possessed, and was smoothing her glossy hair before the looking-glass.

“Not hot, merciful heavens! I don’t know what you’re made of, then. I think I’m hotter than I’ve ever been before.”

“Perhaps you walked faster than I did.”

“I don’t see well how I could do that, as I was behind you the whole way; but it’s always the way, nothing puts you out in the least, Aggie; you’re never too hot, or too cold.”

“Would it content you then if I was broiling?”

There was no answer. Lily was tugging and twisting at the unmanageable mop of hair, which seemed more than ever unmanageable this evening, and the red lips were pouting not at all prettily, and the white forehead was puckered into a very ugly frown.

“I’d better just leave it as it is,” said she, standing defiantly before the glass; there’s no earthly use in fighting against things. I won’t try.”

“Perhaps if you were to take it coolly, and not drag and pull it in that way, as if your object was to tear it all out of your head, it might come right.”

“Take it coolly indeed, that’s just like you. I won’t take it coolly; I’ll take it hotly. I’ll make it go right.” And there was another battle in which the comb lost several teeth, and from which Miss Lily came out only the hotter and angrier.

“You’d never offer to help me, though you know I can’t manage it by myself.”

“You never asked me to help you.”

The fuzzy hair was getting into better

order now, and the owner was cooling down a little, but the hot cheeks were very red still, and the lines in the white forehead were not quite gone yet. My little heroine was a little hasty I am afraid, and had not half the self-control of her elder sister, who having finished her toilet, was sitting at the open window, reading, or pretending to read, a letter, which Lily knew to be a very old one, from a very old aunt, who was famed for the dulness and dryness of her epistles, waiting till all the little odds and ends, the ribbons and bows, and countless pins were adjusted about the person of the cross little girl at the looking-glass. How hard it was for that testy little girl to get all those ribbons and pins into order, and how they would go crooked, and the pins bend everyway.

Oh, Lily, Lily! you foolish vain little girl, I am afraid that you think too much of those charms, which have somehow been growing dearer and more precious than they used to be, before those dark admiring eyes, which look so often on them, were dreamed of; growing more

valuable now than ever they seemed to be long ago. Oh, my little heroine, don't be too vain of those blue eyes and pink cheeks of yours; they are not one bit brighter or more lovely than they were before those soft speaking eyes looked admiration on them—not a bit fairer or more attractive than they were when you looked in that same glass a few short weeks ago; but, they are more to you now a thousand times than they were then, their value is raised tenfold, by the approval of that one big amorous young man, and you are growing very careful and vain of them I am afraid; but then they are your only hold on his affections, and I think you know it—know that if once those blue eyes were to grow dim, and the soft cheeks to lose their rich bright hue, his love would be gone with them, his pretty speeches cease for ever.

CHAPTER VI.

HOPES AND FEARS.

THE two dusty gentlemen, with the discontented countenances, pursued their way with rather lagging steps; there was another hill to be scaled, and they had both had quite enough of the "Excelsior" experiment; they were both very hot and tired, and I think neither of them would have had the presence of mind to decline the maiden's very polite offer, as the hero of the flagstaff did, had such a forward young female presented herself.

They were both hot and weary, and as such circumstances seldom tend towards enlivening people, they were silent, too, for some time; and though the Captain had made up his mind to let Charlie into some of his feelings concerning the fuzzy-haired, cross little girl, still he didn't

know exactly how to begin, and was puffing away at the everlasting cigar, and waiting for his friend to make an opening ; but as that gentleman seemed in no hurry to do so, the Captain thought it better to break the ice at once.

“ I suppose the old fellow—the father I mean—is coming to-morrow ? ”

“ Yes, I think so.”

“ Well, you know it’s a deuced bother having an odd fellow—like the old man, for instance—knocking about under every one’s feet, and spoiling sport. When a party’s made up, hang it, it ought to be done properly, two and two, you know, and all that kind of thing.”

“ Yes, of course ; but if Mr. Fremantle comes that will be all right, won’t it ? ”

“ Oh, yes, if everyone sticks to the right person, and we’re not all butting about in a herd, like to-day.”

“ Why we walked two and two to-day, I’m sure ? ”

“ Now, you know, Okedon, it wasn’t all right to-day. Why, I was walking half the time with that girl of yours,

and, of course, we hadn't a word to say to each other."

"Well, I didn't think you cared which you walked with."

"But I did; and if it's to be like that to-morrow, why I think we'd a deuced deal better stay at home."

"Well, I never care which of them I walked with. I always—"

"Oh, yes, we know all about that; you don't care a bit, of course; but just put it this way: suppose I care very much?"

"Oh, I didn't know—"

"Well I do; and I think it's plain to be seen that you care very much too, though you're going just the way to make her think you don't."

"I don't want her to think anything else. You are quite mistaken, Jack; she cares no more for me than that stone."

"I don't see well how she could, as you never address her or walk near her by any chance. I don't suppose she can know by instinct that you like her."

"And you do like the other then? I wasn't sure."

“Yes, I do, awfully, and I’m not such a fool as not to wish her to know, too.”

“Well, I didn’t know, or I shouldn’t have cut you out to-day, old fellow.”

“Well, I hope you’ll remember to-morrow.”

“Oh yes, of course.”

They were standing on the terrace before the house now, and the Captain was leaning with his back against the stone balustrade, and looking with a moody air at the comfortable red brick walls, with the roses and jasmine climbing on them, and the mellowed sunlight dancing on the latticed windows above.

“What a comfortable old house it is,” he said, “so snug looking, with all those big trees round it.”

“Yes, it’s a comfortable old place enough, and I’m fond of it.”

“You’ve got a fine view down to the sea, a jolly view I declare.”

The Captain had faced round, and was looking very approvingly down the long green slope and avenue of trees away to the blue sea.

“Yes, it’s pretty down there, isn’t it?”

"A little too much wood, I think; but I suppose it's good old wood?"

"Oh, yes, very old."

"I think you're a very lucky fellow, Charlie, a devilish lucky fellow, and I don't understand you."

"How do you mean—you don't understand what?"

"Why, the way you're going on with that girl. Why, if I had half your luck I'd marry to-morrow."

"Well, I think I'm very well as I am, and there's lots of time to think about those things."

"Yes, but don't you think a fellow's much happier when he's married?"

"Well, I don't know; never having tried, I can't say."

"Well, you know what I mean; much happier, much more useful, you know—doing some good in the world; having something to live for. It's every man's duty to marry, I think."

"Oh, you're beginning to think about it, are you? Well, I suppose it is."

"I suppose I must think of it some time, and why not now?"

“As a duty?”

“Well, yes, a duty, if you like.”

The Captain, I think, wanted some one to agree with him, some one to advise him on the subject. When a man has half made up his mind to do something foolish, and yet in his heart knows that he ought to let it alone, he invariably tries to call up this argument. Charlie was not very quick at taking hints, and I think only half understood what his companion was driving at; but he had got an inkling of some of the Captain's feelings, and very wisely determined that whether he deserted Agnes or not, he must keep away from his friend's preserves and not walk with Miss Lily any more.

It was very pleasant lounging on the cool terrace, and a very fresh breeze was coming up the green slope below, and fanning their hot faces. The Captain had made his little confession, and felt more at ease; things would be sure to right to-morrow, that was a comfort, and he felt very amicably to all mankind.

“Who did you say that fellow was that passed us on the road to-day?” he asked.

still leaning against the stone balustrade, and puffing away at his big cigar.

“What, the fellow on the gray mare, do you mean?”

“Yes.”

“Oh, that’s Foulkes, owns the Elms over there; he’s rather hard up, just now, I fancy.”

“Why, it’s a biggish place—isn’t it?”

“Yes; but then he’s awfully dipped just at present.”

“Oh, I see; he was riding a neat little thing.”

“Yes; oh, yes, he’s a very good judge of a horse—always was.”

“And he owns all that slip of land down there by the bay, where the hedge runs?”

“Yes, all along there, and down to the sea.”

“Why, that’s where we went to shoot the other day; it’s all a kind of barren rock, isn’t it? Nothing on it but mushroom and rabbits, as well as I remember.”

“No, it isn’t much of a place.”

“And he lives there. Is he married?”

"No, and he doesn't live there; he's in the army—only comes here for his leave."

"And who lives in the house? Isn't that it we see down there among the trees?"

"Yes; his mother and sister keep house for him."

"And what sort's the sister?"

"Oh, a regular little flirt."

"Anything to some Foulkeses I know, I wonder?"

"Well, the old lady is a Lady Mary Foulkes. I daresay you have met them in London; they go up for the season."

"Lady Mary Foulkes! Why, of course, I've known them these ages; great friends of my mother's, you know, and the little flirt, as you call her, is a great friend of mine; awful fun she is, too."

"Yes, I don't like her."

"Too much for you, eh, old fellow?"

"A good deal too much for me."

"Well, she's the best fun of any girl I ever met."

"I dare say. I don't care for that sort of thing."

“You like a grave, quiet little girl, don’t you? like our friend down there?”

“Better than a flirt, certainly; but once for all, Jack, I’m not in love with Miss Fremantle, I assure you. She’s an awfully nice girl—too good for me, I’m sure, but still I’m not in love with her.”

“Well, by Jove! I thought you were awfully gone about her.”

“I know you did; that’s why I tell you.”

“Then you’re not going to marry her?”

“Not that I know of.”

“Well, that is news, upon my soul.”

Charlie felt relieved, as they sauntered up to the door; he had been intending to make this little declaration for some days past, and though he felt that he had said more than he intended, it was well to put the Captain off the scent. He was very chary of his love, and didn’t like his foolish heart to be laid bare before his friend. He wasn’t much given to bragging of his conquests, and didn’t want a confidant; and yet as they paced up and down there in the sunset, his heart was telling him

that he did love that grave, quiet little girl with the soft eyes, as he had never loved any one before, or should love any one again, and over and over he told himself that he would wait—wait and hope—that such a love must be requited some time or another; that time would soften her heart, and make her like him. And all the time that same grave little girl was living in a dream, a dream of which he was the light and substance, waiting and hoping, too, and yet trying to hide her foolish love.

“Well, there’s one fool less in the world than I thought,” said the Captain. “I’m rather glad you’re not fond of her, old fellow.”

“Why?”

“Well, I don’t know exactly, but I am. I always envy a fellow who’s not susceptible.”

“Are you always in love, then?”

“Well, not exactly always, but I’ve been badly smitten once or twice. That little Fanny Foulkes, you know, I was spoony on her for some time.”

“Oh! is that long ago?”

“ Oh dear no, very lately ; just before I came here.”

“ Oh, I see ; just before you saw a certain young lady of our acquaintance ; is that it ?”

“ Well, yes ; but then that was a different kind of thing.”

“ Oh, indeed !”

“ You see, Miss Fanny isn’t exactly the kind of young lady a fellow would like to marry ; she’s very well in a ball-room and all that sort of thing, but hang it, I’d think twice before I booked myself there.”

“ But the other ?”

“ Well, she’s different, you know, Charlie. I fancy she’d make a nice little wife ; don’t you ?”

“ I think so.”

“ And hang it, a fellow can’t be knocking about this way for ever ; it grows dull after a bit.”

“ Yes, I’m sure ; I’m glad to see you beginning to think of settling down, Jack.”

“ Thank you, old fellow ; it’s very kind of you to say so, and indeed I’ve been thinking—Charlie, I’ve been thinking

of getting married ; do you advise me ?”

Charlie was taken by surprise. He hadn't expected this sudden declaration, and didn't know what to say.

“ Well, if you are fond of any one—”

“ I am awfully fond of her—that little girl down there—Lily, you know. I'm more in love with her than I ever was with any one before, and—and—I want you to advise me, Charlie. I do, indeed. I want you to tell me that—that you think I'm right—that I ought to ask her.”

“ Well, if you're sure about it, Jack, and think that you can't do without her, I do advise you—though—”

“ There, that's a good fellow, I knew you would, and—and—I'll ask her to-morrow. I know my mother 'll like her ; she must, and if she doesn't, I don't care. I'm glad I told you, old fellow, I am indeed ; I've been thinking over it this ever so long, and I'm sure I'm right,” and the Captain took his friend by both hands and looked full into his face. I think that small voice was speaking to him still in

the depths of his troubled heart, and telling him to leave things as they were, but he wouldn't listen to it; he was trying to drown it with that volley of words, and he wanted his friend to help him.

"You've only known her a fortnight, Jack."

"But I know her as well now as ever I shall know her; I'm awfully fond of her, Charlie; don't tell me I'd better leave it alone. I couldn't live without her; I swear I couldn't."

"Then marry her, my dear fellow, and I'm sure you'll be very happy."

They sauntered up and down there a little longer, and the Captain had a good deal to say still, and his young confidant was very patient, and gave what advice he could under the trying circumstances; for truth to say, the more he heard of the Captain's hopes and fears, the less he approved of the whole affair.

"It isn't much to live on, Jack; two hundred a year will hardly keep house for a fellow with your habits; it's very well now you know, but you'll find it very different when you're married."

“Yes, I know it’s not much; but if she’s satisfied to live on it, I can too; and then you know I shall have more, Charlie, in time.”

“Don’t you think if you were to wait a little, it might be better?”

“Wait; I see myself. Wait twenty years or so, and a nice young couple we’d be by that time. Oh no, I’ll not wait on any such chance as that. I’ll ask her to-morrow, and then, if she likes me, she won’t think the two hundred too little.”

“Well, I hope it’ll all come right; and perhaps you’re wise not to wait; if you think she likes you, it’s better to ask her at once.”

“I think she does.”

And they turned into the house, and the Captain was a long time over his toilet, and came down rather absent, and didn’t eat much dinner, but drank a good deal of wine. They were both silent most of the time. Charlie had no more to say on the subject nearest his friend’s heart, and the Captain had nothing to say on any subject, and they were both glad I dare-say when the meal was completed, and

they were relieved from the presence of that respectful but watchful individual, the butler.

"I say, Jack, you'd like to meet Foulkes, wouldn't you?" said Charlie, breaking the ice at once, lest his friend should begin again on the old subject. "He's a very nice fellow, and I'm sure you'd get on."

"Yes, I don't mind knowing him; he looks a jolly sort of fellow."

"Well, then, we'll walk down there some morning; I'm sure he'd like to know you."

Charlie had walked over to the glass door, which opened on to the grass slope at the side of the house, and threw it open, and the soft evening breeze came stealing into the room laden with the scent of the roses and jasmine and verbena, that were growing so closely over the red brick walls, and twining themselves round the windows.

"Let us come out," said the Captain, coming over and standing beside him. "It looks so cool and jolly out there;" and so, having lit their cigars, these two

worthies sauntered off down the hill; Charlie wanted to see about the yacht; and have things made ready for the morning; and—"I say, Jack, wouldn't it be a good plan if I asked Foulkes to come to-morrow, we'd be six then you know, two and two, as you were saying?"

"Yes, a very good idea, write him a line now, or send him word or something before we go; he'll keep the old fellow company the whole day."

So Charlie on this new idea retraced his steps up the hill, and entered the house again, and penned a short epistle to the innocent Foulkes, who was supposed to keep the old fellow company, and otherwise make himself useful all to-morrow.

"I'm ready now," he said, emerging again. "Jones will take it up in a minute or so; he's sure to come."

So, arm in arm these two men, silent and thoughtful, walked off down the hill, under the green waving trees, walked off very good friends now, and liking each other better than they had ever done before.

CHAPTER VII.

A YACHTING PARTY.

FATE seemed to smile on their plans, and the morning rose bright and cheerful, with just sufficient wind to carry them quickly over the watery part of the excursion; Captain Foulkes would be delighted to join them, so the troublesome old man was disposed of; and everything seemed to be going well with the arrangements of the great day which was to seal the Captain's fate.

Lily, unconscious Lily, was in a ferment of excitement and expectation, the day was so fine, not too hot, just right, and the fidgety little figure in the blue muslin dress was running up and down the stairs, and sadly confusing her elder sister, who, with the assistance of the cook, was busy with a mysterious hamper, and sundry

pie-dishes and bottles, in the back parlour.

“What’s the use of running about in that insane manner, Lily, doing nothing, and confusing everybody? do shut the door, and either stay in or out, for mercy’s sake!”

“Mayn’t I help, Aggie? I’m sure I could put up some of those things just as well as you. Let me try.”

“Now leave them alone, Lily; they’d have been done half an hour ago only for you. Can’t you go up to the drawing-room, and I’ll be with you in a minute?”

“You’re *very* cross,” muttered Lily, giving in nevertheless, and leaving Aggie to her mysterious occupations, and shutting the door with a bang.

“Thank goodness,” murmured that young lady, who had sunk on her knees, not in thankfulness, but simply to facilitate the process of cramming the hamper. “Hand me that bottle, Rogers; I think we had better put some straw round it; don’t you?”

“I think so, please ma’am,” and so they were left another minute in peace,

and the last item had been carefully stuffed in, the last wisp of straw mingled with the eatables; and the process of cording and tying had just begun, when once again the door was flung open, once again the troublesome little figure in the blue dress and fuzzy hair appeared in the opening.

“You must come and get ready, Aggie, now, at once; I see Mr. Okedon and Captain Dashwood coming down the hill.”

“Well, I’m ready now, come along. Where’s pa?”

“Oh, I made him put on his hat half an hour ago; I suppose he’s waiting in the drawing-room. Come up quick.”

And the little feet scaled the stairs two steps at a time, and disappeared. It wasn’t a long process that getting ready, and the two gentlemen had only just arrived as the two little figures in the blue muslin dresses and shady hats, tripped down the steps to meet them.

“You’re in good time, I see,” said Charlie. “I think we shall have a jolly sail over, though I hope it won’t rain.”

“Rain—oh, no; I don’t think it looks a bit like rain,” said the Captain, craning his neck to inspect the cloudy blue sky.

“Oh, I hope not,” said Lily; “it would be such a pity. But hadn’t we better go at once?”

“Where’s pa?” cried Agnes. “Oh, here he is. Now we’re quite ready.”

Then there was a shaking of hands over again, and then they sauntered on to the pier, very happy and good-humoured.

“I’ve asked Foulkes to come. You know him, I think?” said Charlie, speaking across Mr. Fremantle to his love.

“Yes; oh yes, we know him. Is he coming?”

“Yes, he’s to meet us on the pier.”

They sauntered on still along the sandy green, where groups of children were playing croquet and cricket, and otherwise displaying their infantine capacities for active motion; where troops of young ladies, all shady hatted, were pacing up and down, some of them displaying ostentatiously and unaccountably their fine long hair, all let loose down their backs,

tossing and waving in the cool breeze, along by the low stone wall, where the sea beat itself and broke into foam and spray, and where the male population of Llanaber assembled morning after morning to smoke the pipe of peace and inhale the fresh sea breeze.

Far away stretched the clear blue water of the straits, rippling and swelling with the strong high tide, far away in a long line of golden blue, studded here and there with the specks of sails, distinct and dazzling, blue, blue sea and blue mountains, which were standing out decided and clear against the cloudy sky.

"Just the day for a sail," said the Captain; "there's a stunning fresh breeze."

"Yes, charming!" cried Lily, who was tripping along beside him, and trying to keep pace with those long legs of his.

"I don't think it will rain," continued he; "that breeze will blow it off."

"I hope not, but the mountains look very near."

"Well, even if it does, we won't melt, I suppose, and we've got umbrellas."

Half an hour after, that smart white-sailed little yacht, waiting down there, was little more than a speck to the frisking children and long-haired damsels on the beach.

It hadn't taken long to embark and fill the fluttering sails with the fresh breeze, and then the blue water was cutting and hissing under the sharp keel, and the mountains and trees and rocks were all left behind in a minute.

"This is what I call jolly," cried the Captain, who was sitting very contentedly beside Miss Lily on that nice little bench up there at the stern, which just held two, "awfully jolly, don't you think so?" And he looked down on the fresh peach-coloured cheeks and rosy lips. "Why, we've left the pier and the cliffs and everything miles behind already."

Lily was looking back over the clear rippling water with those big eyes of hers, those far-off-looking blue eyes, and she didn't see how oddly this new friend of hers was looking at her—she didn't see the strange passionate look in his handsome face, as his dark eyes took in, one by

one the charming items in the bright little picture before them ; she couldn't know all the thoughts which were passing in his bewildered brain, or how wildly the heart was thumping under that velveteen coat ; she only heard the commonplace words, and answered them without turning round—

“ Yes, we're leaving everything behind ; we shall soon be out of sight of Llanaber altogether.”

“ Would you be very sorry to leave Llanaber for ever ?” he said, “ very sorry to leave the sea, and the ruins, and everything, for good ?”

She couldn't tell him, that without him the sea and land and everything would be nothing, that the sunshine and light would be gone for her ; she couldn't tell him all this—it wouldn't be proper—so she only said—

“ Well, yes, I should be very sorry to go just yet ; I like Llanaber very well.”

He chewed the end of his long moustachio in silence ; he didn't know what to say next, and was beginning to find the

task before him a very hard one; perhaps, after all, he was mistaken that she really didn't care for him a bit; and he looked down again on the soft-tinted young face meditatively.

"I think you're too cold-hearted to care much for anything or anyone?" he said.

She looked up now into the handsome face which was bending over her. There was no mistaking the strange, earnest look in those deep eyes—the passionate look.

He did like her, then, after all; and the foolish little heart was all in a flutter, and a very rich, bright blush dyed the soft cheeks; she could have pinched them black and blue for blushing that way; she could have torn her hair out by handfuls, or done anything else to herself that minute for being such a fool and looking so conscious; but there was nothing for it but to wait and let the horrid blush subside how it would.

"Arn't we going swimmingly?" interrupted that very dull person, Mr. Charles Okedon, who, I think, ought to have

known better, considering how much he was in his friend's confidence, than to interrupt the little *tête-à-tête*.

"There's just a right breeze for her. We're going a good pace, arn't we?"

"Yes, delightful," murmured Miss Lily, who was, I think, very thankful to the awkward young man for his untimely interruption.

"We'll be there in no time," he continued. "I see the town even now."

Charlie was in a very good temper; everything was going on smoothly. Foulkes was doing his duty like a man—couldn't have done it better, in fact, if he had been told. I fancy that the kind-hearted man of the world saw pretty well how matters were, and good-naturedly resolved to sacrifice himself.

It was plain to be seen that that was a regular case over there on the bench in the stern, and he didn't know exactly about the other two, but he fancied there might be something there also, and that the only person with whom it was safe to converse was the gray-headed old man, who was quite beyond the age for such

doings, and was, besides, a person of some information, could talk a good deal on almost every subject very agreeably, and had seen something of life in his day, and good life too; so the amiable Foulkes and the elderly gentleman were getting on very well together, and found that they agreed on almost every topic.

Charlie was very happy and contented; he had his Agnes all to himself, and though he wasn't making quite such rapid strides as his friend, still they had been chatting very pleasantly, and he fancied that the grave little girl seemed to like his company, and was looking very well pleased and happy. So for him things were going well, and it never struck him that those sage remarks so untimely and uninteresting could disturb the innocent *tête-à-tête* in the corner; Lily clung to the conversation like a drowning man to a straw, or anything else equally desperate; she felt that she could talk so much better to that matter-of-fact young man than to the other one at her side, who asked such odd questions, and looked so very affectionately down on her; she felt

that she had nothing to answer to those looks and words, and that she could not make a new conversation for him, if Charlie went away, and my poor little heroine felt very miserable and awkward, and looked very hot and uneasy as she sat there.

But Charlie had no idea of remaining all day by the side of the unhappy little girl; he had his duties to attend to, and Miss Agnes was sitting over there on a bundle of rugs all alone.

How cool and contented she looked, sitting there with her nimble fingers twisting themselves about with those everlasting knitting needles, and using up yards upon yards of soft white wool; how could she do it, thought her fidgety little sister, who couldn't have made two stitches right to save her life just then; but then Aggie hadn't a big man in a velveteen coat sitting into her pocket, and a deep voice asking her very odd questions, she hadn't two long moustachios tickling her hot ears, and two large passionate eyes fixed on her flushed cheeks; there was nothing to make her

look hot or miserable; and the knitting-needles went click, click, click, and the breeze fluttered the white wool, but it didn't make the soft cheeks a bit redder, or ruffle the smooth bow of hair at the back of that bending head, as it was doing with the fuzzy locks of the other young lady, who was looking enviously over from her seat on the bench.

Truth to say, Miss Agnes was not very happy with her knitting and thoughts, she was working on at that mysterious piece of wool very mechanically; but her thoughts were not among the stitches and loops, they were wandering off to that foolish dream-castle of hers, that enchanted abode where they had been straying so often lately, and which was growing and enlarging every day; and there was a sad load on her heart and a great foreboding shadow there; and she was making and framing all kinds of new resolutions for the future, out of which that castle in the air was to be excluded; she would make a great effort and shake off the strange influence which that enchanter in the frieze coat was getting over her, the strange

happy influence which those clear honest tones and kind gray eyes were flinging round her; she would shake them all off and be free, after this one happy day.

So you see that the unperturbed little figure over there had her own griefs to herself, was fighting her own battle all alone, and was listening to, and thinking of, words and looks more exciting far than those of the hero of the velveteen coat, which were confusing and flushing her foolish little sister. But the nimble fingers didn't flag in their work, and the soft fair cheeks were quite cool and fresh, and the pale regular young profile, stood out clear and cold against the blue sky.

"Working still?" said her big young hero, standing before her, with his hands in his pockets, looking down on the tangled mass of white wool which was weaving itself into a sad mess unheeded at her feet. "Why, look here, what you've been doing;" and he stooped down and gathered up the big roll in his hands. "It's all in the most frightful mess, how did you get it like that?"

"Oh yes, indeed, so it is; I don't know, I'm sure."

"Let me see;" and he sat down at her feet and busied himself with the knots and tangles; "it's in an awful state."

"How on earth did it get like that? I only let it down a minute ago."

"You weren't thinking what you were doing. Your thoughts were somewhere else, that's plain." The truth of the words brought a faint flush into those cool cheeks, which the accuser seeing didn't like. She had been thinking of some one then, and he was right. So he sat moodily at her feet, pulling and struggling with the hopeless entanglement.

"It's a regular Penelope's web," she said, laughing. "I think we'd better leave it alone, and not try to find the end."

"How impatient you are, Miss Fremantle; nearly everything can be done in time if we take it patiently."

"Well, let us see," she said, and the tugging and twisting process went on still. Click, click, click, went the knitting-needles, and the mountains and woods

and valleys were rushing away still, and the tiny village of Llanaber was little more than a speck in the distance now.

"I'm afraid I must give it up," he said. "You were right after all, patience can't do everything," and he sighed; perhaps he had been thinking, too, and that his thoughts hadn't been pleasant. She looked down, and laughed.

"Then you confess yourself beaten?" she said.

"Well, I suppose so. I give in. That's more like it. I want that patience we were talking of just now."

"Yes, I think you do." She didn't know why she said it; it had slipped out unawares. He looked up quickly, but he couldn't see her face, that horrid little mushroom hat was bent so low. He was pulling at the tangled mass again, rather more violently than was necessary I think.

"Why do you say so?" he asked.

"I don't know, really. I didn't mean to say it." She was looking up now, and so was he, but she didn't look a bit put out, and he began to think that it was

only his fancy that had given the words that meaning sound.

“You’ll have to leave off now; you can’t work any more.”

“Well, I don’t much mind. We’re close to our destination; arn’t we?”

“Yes, quite close. I suppose in ten minutes or so we shall be in.”

The clicking of the needles had stopped now, and Aggie sat, with crossed hands, looking down on that long prostrate figure at her feet, and from time to time making some slight remark; throwing a word now and then, as one might throw a bit of biscuit to a dog, which were snapped up eagerly by the large individual. They looked very happy and cheerful to Lily’s eyes, who was still hot and uneasy, and trying to talk to her companion, who would merge off into confusing subjects, and was, I fancy, laying too long a paving before he came to the great subject.

They had been sitting there ever since on that uncomfortable little bench, talking nonsense, and the other group looked so pleasant and cozy, Lily fancied she could talk better if they were all together;

Aggie always made conversation for every one, it was a knack she had ; she never was put out by anything ; she never got too hot, or looked foolish, and never blushed for nothing, which was a gift that fuzzy-haired little girl envied her very much. It would be much nicer to join the others, they might all sit on the ground then, which looked so much more comfortable than their miserable little plank ; so Lily, filled with this new idea, stood up and said—

“ Let us come and sit there with the others.”

“ We’re much jollier here,” murmured the Captain, who didn’t find the miserable little plank at all too small. “ What do you want with the others ? as you call them ; I’m sure they don’t want us.”

“ I—I want to ask Mr. Okedon when we shall be in ;” and the blue muslin fluttered over with a little rustling to the group on the railway rugs. Whether they did want them or not didn’t transpire, as Aggie and Mr. Okedon didn’t look either very savage or very well pleased, but Lily didn’t care much, she

really couldn't endure another half hour alone with that foolish big man ; so the rugs were spread on the cool deck, and these four young persons disposed of themselves on them.

Aggie kept the conversation going very pleasantly, as her sister had foretold, and there was no more nonsense talked, no more confusing subjects alluded to, and Lily was much more at her ease there, than she had been ever since they quitted the friendly little village and white pier. The Captain was looking very cross and stupid, as Lily could see every now and then when she raised her head for a minute ; he wasn't joining very spiritedly in the conversation, which was kept up principally by Charlie and Agnes, but was sitting very moodily with his hat pulled down over his nose, still chewing the end of those long moustachios and looking out with lazy eyes on the flying view.

"Here we are," cried Charlie, "at last ; we'll be in now in a second. I say, Williams, hadn't we better put about ?"

"Not just yet a bit, sir ; we'll make a

short tack this time, and run her in close to shore."

A minute more and the white sails were furled and the anchor cast, and then the little party, two and two, were landed safely in the tiny punt, and stood in a group on the strange shore, undecided, and not knowing what to do next.

"We'd much better send on the grub in a donkey-shay, or something, and walk up the hill. It isn't long, is it?" asked the Captain, who was still moody, and hadn't favoured the company with a remark for at least a quarter of an hour, and who was just now leaning against a little whitewashed wall and glancing very savagely at the unconscious Foulkes, who was standing very close to Miss Lily, actually buttoning her glove for her while saying something very knowing in a very low tone, which made those rosy cheeks still redder, and caused the blue eyes to look up in a way in which the Captain had never seen them do before.

"Well yes, I think that's the best thing we can do, it's only about ten minutes' walk;" assented Charlie, and so, slowly

and quietly the hill was scaled, Miss Lily still chatting and laughing in the most provoking manner with that jolly, good-humoured gentleman by her side, and utterly forgetting, I am sure, the presence of that other person who had bothered her so all the morning. Agnes and Charlie, still true to each other, were a long way behind, talking and laughing too; so the Captain found himself left with the gray-headed gentleman to scale the hill, and make what conversation he could. He did exert himself a little this time; it wouldn't do that the old man should think him a fool; he must try and rouse himself, and see what he could do.

"We came at a good rate, didn't we, sir?" he asked; "and it's a jolly sail down here."

"Charming; beautiful indeed," answered his companion, turning round and pausing to look down on the fair wooded view, and blue water. "I've seldom seen finer scenery; it's grand."

The Captain halted too, and they stood in silence for a few minutes, each a little absent, and then the old man spoke again.

"I don't know whether it's the same with every one, but fine scenery, like fine music, always makes me thoughtful and often sad." The Captain had no objection to his becoming thoughtful then, and thinking all the way up the hill if he liked, but he didn't say so. It wouldn't have done, and he only muttered—

"Oh yes, of course, I know," and then paused again.

"It's a strange feeling, a most unaccountable feeling, and comes to us now and then in our lives when we look upon something in nature particularly grand or sublime; there's something of wonder, something of pleasure, and something of despair in that feeling, I think."

Captain Jack was getting a little confused, he didn't quite understand, and was beginning to think there was a screw loose somewhere in that venerable head. Pleasure, and wonder, and despair, and scenery, and he forgot what more. "Oh, hang it;" the conversation was getting beyond him, he wasn't quite up to that kind of thing, and didn't remember having ever looked at anything whether in art or nature,

with his brains in such a jumbled up condition; pleasure he had felt sometimes, and wonder, too, perhaps, "but hang it, there was nothing in a mountain to make any fellow despair," that he could see; the old fellow was talking great bosh, and must be a little gone. So they walked on still up the hill in silence. The Captain was afraid to talk about the weather, for fear there might be something in it to despair about; so he wisely held his peace, and waited for his companion to start a new subject. That gentleman had become thoughtful at last, and was plodding on very mechanically, forgetful of the scenery, and despair, and wonder, and everything connected with it most likely, and forgetful, too, of the bewildered young man at his side, who was looking on up the road very disconsolately, wondering was it ever to come to an end. The two figures on in front had gained on them a good bit, in consequence of the pause they had made a few minutes ago. They were on a good way now, and the laughter and sound of voices was fainter and further off. The ten minutes seemed

like ten hours, but they couldn't be far from the top now, that was one comfort.

It didn't seem a long walk at all to Agnes and Charlie; they didn't mind the hill or think the top a bit too far off; and I think wouldn't have minded if they had had three times as long a road before them. But every road must end somewhere, if only at a stone wall, and this road ended all too soon for those two happy young people. The walk had hardly been begun for them when it came to an end, and they found themselves at the top of that very short hill and close to the village street which was to lead them to their destination.

"Whereabouts is the castle, Charlie?" asked Captain Dashwood, who had found another low white-washed wall to lean against, and was looking hopelessly after those two provoking figures in the distance, who were keeping their distance very effectually, and were just now a good way up in the street.

"Oh, follow Foulkes, he knows as well as I do where it is; we've only got to

turn down to the right once and we are facing it close then."

So down to the right they turned, and there before them high and cold rose the tall tower famed in history, the tower where so many hundred years ago a tiny royal voice first rose to tell the hills and woods and valleys that they had a prince at last. High and dark it rose against the cloudy sky, like a shadow of the past; high and cold in its majestic beauty, with the dust of centuries crusting on its aged walls; they paused there at the top of the street to look upon that great old castle, those dark solemn walls which were facing them, and then on down to the great gate frowning deep and high above their heads. Arrived at last, and now there was nothing to do but roam over the long passages, and peep into the tiny rooms, and scale the countless steps up the winding stair, to take a wide look over the map-like view beneath, and then descend again and partake of a romantic luncheon on the cool grass, under the shadowy walls.

We needn't dwell on the pleasures of

that gipsying, on the countless little inconveniences which were borne so good humouredly and merrily. We needn't tell of all the little accidents that befel; how the Captain emptied the salt into the gooseberry pie, by mistake, or how, there having been an accident among the bottles in the hamper, the sandwiches and chickens were all floating in a sea of lemonade and cider. These things occur at almost every pic-nic, no matter how well arranged, and are endured with the same cheerfulness and good humour never displayed on any other occasion; and we are all sufficiently acquainted with the happiness of dining on the damp grass, with earwigs and centipèdes mingled with the eatables, and the buzzing of bees and wasps and blue-bottle flies in our ears; there is nothing new in it, so we will leave our party to refresh themselves a little, and take our prying eyes off their movements for half an hour or so.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE OLD OLD STORY IS TOLD AGAIN.

DAYS such as these always seem to go quicker than the others, hours are turned into minutes, and the sun is setting before we are aware. Our holiday is over, and it is time to be thinking of turning homewards, while still the laugh and song are at their height, and the young feet are as yet untired. My little party had spent a very pleasant day among the ruins; the Captain's sulkiness had worn away; he had found his way back to the side of the provoking little girl who had been running away from him all the morning, and they were all wending their way down that gentle hill very happily towards the station to catch the train. Foulkes, the baffled Foulkes, was once again thrown with the gray-headed old gentleman, and

they were stalking on in front, theorizing and disputing, and talking very loudly ; and Charlie, who was behaving "like a man," as his friend afterwards told him, was still glued to the side of his grave little saint, talking still, and not interfering with those other two who were bringing up the rear ; the rain, the much-dreaded rain, had kept off all day, but just now a few stray drops were sprinkling down, and the clouds were looking blacker and more ominous, and a far-off storm, which had long been brewing, was drawing nearer and nearer ; they had no time to spare, and in a minute more they were all pushing and driving among the crowd, which was to be disposed of in that fast approaching train.

"Where's Lily?" inquired Agnes, looking this way and that, up and down the platform for the missing young lady, who was nowhere to be seen.

"Here you are, mum ; lady and gentleman, just got in down here ;" and they were pushed and huddled into a dim saloon carriage, into which they had just time to scramble, and then the door was banged, the



shrill whistle shrieked, and the train moved on. The missing Lily wasn't here either, and the four others simply conjectured that that young lady and her companion must be in some other carriage.

"We'll get them in here at the next station," suggested Charlie, when just as that whistle sounded, and the engine gave a first spasmodic start, two figures came rushing in at the station door, one a bewildered little girl in a blue muslin dress, and the other a big gentleman in a velveteen coat, and with heavy drooping moustachios, who was gesticulating frantically with his umbrella at the unconscious engine driver, to the back of whose head the signals were made. One more shriek, one more spasmodic jerk, and the train was on down the line, regardless of the despair of the young lady in blue, and shouts of the gentleman in velveteen. There was nothing for it now, the train was gone, that was plain; so the Captain and his little friend stood hopelessly looking after it; no train for two hours again, what was to be done? The rain was pelting down on the little

wooden shed where they were standing, and dripping through on to their heads; it wasn't a pleasant look out a two hours' wait in the cold and damp; Lily was in despair.

"What shall we do?" she cried, as the obdurate train went flying further and further away. "What on earth shall we do?"

"Stay where we are, and wait for the next," replied the Captain, who didn't much care how long the next was in coming, and rather liked the catastrophe.

"How stupid of them to go on that way, without ever looking to see were we coming; they might have waited, I think."

"Well, we must only try and make ourselves comfortable, and wait patiently; two hours isn't so very long after all, and they're sure to look out for us at A—— station."

So Lily, who began to see that, after all, it wasn't such a very dreadful calamity as she at first thought, began to reconcile herself to her situation, and looked about for a bench.

“Here you are,” cried the Captain, leading the way to a very desolate, damp-looking seat in the corner. “But hadn’t we better go up to some hotel or something? You’ll get drenched here with the rain dripping down through those chinks up there upon you.”

“Oh, no, I—I don’t mind; I—I think we’d better wait here.”

So side by side on the damp bench in the corner, these two deserted babes in the wood sat them down, not to cry, but simply to wait for those two long hours to drag themselves out; it was rather an awkward position, and they both felt it so I think, particularly awkward, considering those little speeches which had been made on board the yacht this morning; and Lily was looking down on the dingy boards, and tapping the top of her boot with her umbrella; it was very awkward sitting there all alone with that big man, and not speaking a word; but it might have been more awkward still if the Captain had chosen to begin his odd speech making again, so perhaps the silence was best.

Captain Dashwood felt angry with himself as the minutes went rolling on, and the rain fell thicker and heavier. Why couldn't he speak to that little girl at his side, as he would have spoken to a score of other young ladies he knew? why couldn't he talk to her about something, anything, his hunting, his regiment, his friends? why couldn't he stop trying to twist that harmless little locket off his chain, and try to make those two hours pass a little pleasantly for the shy little person? He didn't know how it was, he must speak to her in one strain or not at all; he must tell her what he had been thinking of all that day, or hold his tongue for good; so he sat there twirling his chain, and chewing those everlasting moustachios as usual, not feeling very happy or pleased with himself.

"You're getting wet there; I knew you would; let me put my coat over you; you'll have all the starch out of that jolly dress in a minute more."

He was busy tucking the India-rubber coat around her now, and covering the soft blue muslin carefully. It was very

kind and thoughtful of him, but she only murmured "Thank you," very quietly, and then he sat down again. Oh for a "Punch," or piece of knitting, or anything to keep her idle fingers quiet, and fix those wandering eyes somewhere. She knew he was looking down on those little hands of hers, which were cased in such neat little dogskin gloves, lying idly in her lap; she knew when he looked from the dogskin gloves up to the soft chin and red lips which were just appearing beneath the mushroom hat; and she felt that horrid red glow stealing into her foolish cheeks again, and she bit the red lips angrily, and twisted and pinched those pretty little gloves in the most uncalled-for manner. Plash, plash, plash, went the heavy drops down on the damp boards and iron rails, and very desolate and ugly looked the long prospect of railway line and mud-bank stretching away for miles in front of them.

What a desolate little station it was, standing there all alone, like a sentry-box, on a little patch of grass, with the rain pattering down so heavily on its desolate

little wooden roof, and running down in streams upon its dingy floor; a very lonely station, with not a creature near but those two stupid people sitting over there on the bench in the corner. The wind was flapping the India-rubber coat this way and that, and trying to pull the ugly little mushroom hat off the fuzzy head; it was tossing and dishevelling that long moustache, too, and making dog's ears of the soft nut-brown hair. Plash, plash, plash, and they were still silently looking out on the unenlivening prospect. It was too absurd this; the Captain felt that something must be said, some topic started.

"Looks lively, doesn't it?" he said, still looking away into the mist. "I wonder what they are saying about us, or whether they miss us at all."

"Well, I suppose they do miss us; it was very stupid of them to rush on so, when they knew we were so long behind them."

"Well, I don't mind the wait, though you seem to think it the worst thing that could have happened. I think we're just

as well *here* all to ourselves as sitting in a stuffy train."

She didn't make any answer, she didn't know what to say, and the dogskin fingers twisted themselves into a knot, and lay there very despairingly on the India-rubber coat.

"I never missed a train in my life before," he continued, looking straight before him, on to the mud wall, where the rain was making a little rill and running down in a miniature cascade. "It seems like fate or something, doesn't it?" and he looked round on the silent little figure.

"I don't think fate had much to say to it; it was our own stupidity and laziness."

"I don't know that; I think it was fate, or whatever it is, that wanted to give us an opportunity for having a talk."

There was another silence, a dreadful silence to that troubled little person. He was going to begin speech-making again; then, it was very unkind and mean of him to take such an advantage of her;

and the red lips were bitten again angrily, and the mushroom hat was bent lower.

“It has given me an opportunity for— for saying something I have been wanting to say to you all day,” he said, and those dark eyes were bent in a very foolish way on the boards, and the poor little locket received a very alarming wrench indeed; “something I have been thinking of saying to you for a long time; can’t you guess?”

She couldn’t answer, she couldn’t have said a word to save her life, and she felt the warm blood receding from her cheeks.

“Can’t you guess, Lily? I think you know what I mean; may I say it, darling?” and the big hand had released the locket and was catching hold of the nearest dogskin very desperately.

“Oh don’t, don’t!” and the captured hand was struggling frantically; “please don’t; I—I’d rather not.”

“But you must listen to me, Lily, you must; I—I want to tell you how awfully I’m in love with you; won’t you listen? don’t you believe me, I love you better

than all the world—better than everything? and—and I want you to be my wife, my own little wife; say you will. Oh, darling, say you will;” and the handsome face was bent very close to the shady hat, and the other big arm was stealing round the little figure. She couldn’t speak—she couldn’t move; the rails, and mud-banks, and all were swimming before her troubled eyes, and she saw nothing but that big shadow bending over her, those passionate eyes looking into her own wondering ones, felt only a strong arm drawing her nearer and closer to a velveteen bosom, and in another minute the fuzzy head was butting and hiding itself against that uncomfortable resting place, and big salt tears were making countless spots and rills over the rough surface. Why should we linger here, or listen to all the foolish words which were breathed over that dishevelled head? It is only the old, old story over again, and we all know it off by heart now; and the mud-banks and rain all were melting away before the splendid castle in the air which that big foolish



young man was building out of his two hundred a year, for that trusting little girl at his side.

“My darling!” he said, and the long, thick moustachios brushed the hot cheek, and the curly head nestled closer into its hiding place; “it’s all right now, isn’t it?” There was no answer, only more butting and nestling, and the rain was plashing and dripping unheeded over their heads. “We needn’t be afraid of any one being angry with us for missing the train now, need we?”

“No,” came murmuring up from among the dishevelled curls, and the wind blew them about, and ruffled them sadly. And the poor little mushroom hat was lying there in a puddle on the wet boards, with no one to think of it or pick it up; how it got there I’m sure I don’t know, but there it was, sadly battered and out of shape, and I fancy that fuzzy-haired young lady had forgotten what a very broad leaf and how slight a hold it had on her butting head when she made her first plunge at the velveteen coat, and perhaps didn’t miss it even now.

It wasn't a very romantic situation for a declaration; but there was no romance wanting now; and the two hours were flying all too quickly, and all the plans and hopes and fears weren't half discussed before the horrid train appeared in the distance, shrieking and whistling, and the presence of passengers and porters compelled those two very oddly-behaved young persons to hold their tongues and sit up straight.

Fate thinking she had done enough I suppose towards promoting this very eligible match, didn't interfere towards keeping sundry cross old women and sleepy old men out of the quiet compartment where these two happy young mortals had settled themselves in the train, bound for A——, and the journey had to be made in comparative silence. One elderly female, who, I think, strongly suspected them of being a bride and bridegroom, kept such a close watch on their movements that the Captain felt a strong desire to fling that memorable article, the India-rubber coat, over her head, and so quiet her, if not for ever, at least till the

journey came to an end. The two wicked young people laughed considerably over this proposition of the Captain's, which unseemly mirth elicited savage and drowsy glances from the somnolent old gentlemen in the far corners.

That time in the train seemed, oh, so much longer than the time spent in the damp little shed; but it came to an end at last, and they came shrieking and whistling into the A—— station just as the big clock over the hotel door was striking ten, and the light of the gas lamps fell in vivid and distinct gleams on a little group who were huddled together in a corner looking anxiously at the passing passengers who were tumbling and rolling out of the carriages, and going their several ways in peace.

It fell on the anxious and wistful face of Agnes, who was looking this way and that, and up and down the platform; it fell on the indifferent young face at her side, and danced on the big buttons on a gray frieze coat; it fell on the good-humoured, amused face of Tom Foulkes, who was vastly tickled by the whole affair,

and thought it one of the best jokes he had ever heard of in his life; it fell on the stern, angry face of an elderly gentleman with gray hair; and lastly, it fell on those two figures emerging out of that dim carriage, and played upon their bashful faces, and lit them up in a most provoking way.

Then there was a hurried incoherent explanation, during which the good-humoured, jolly face worked convulsively, and displayed most alarming symptoms of being on the point of bursting. Then there was a hurrying out of the station into the rain; that naughty little dogskin glove lying very passively on the protecting arm of the elderly gentleman who was rushing and striding he scarcely knew where, I think, and the blue eyes glancing up furtively from under the mushroom hat, through that kind face, looking very stern and cold under the fitful light.



CHAPTER IX.

A CONFESSION.

IT was very hard to have them all looking so hard and cross just then, my little heroine thought, when she was so happy and contented—very hard; but then, how were they to know all that had passed in the little railway shed in those two hours? how were they to know that the big man who had just now taken such a quiet leave of them under the stone arch had a better right to sit with her and walk and talk with her all day if he chose than any of them? It was very hard to have to say good-bye so coldly, and not to look up once into those fond eyes; it was very, very hard to have that big kind hand take hers for just one brief minute, and then drop it; but it must be done, so the leave-taking was cold and stiff, and

though the broad hand did press the dog-skin very significantly, she only let it lie there for a minute, and then turned, and fled up the familiar stone steps.

Up still to that cheerful little bed-room, with the white muslin curtains and tiny beds, flew the flustered little figure in blue; there was another figure in blue standing at the glass, removing one by one the damp garments of the day. In rushed that flustered little person, very hot and out of breath, and the door was shut with a great bang, which made the candles wave and flare, and startled the calm young lady at the glass, who turned round and confronted her sister in amazement.

“For gracious sake, Lily, when will you learn to shut the doors a little quietly, and not bang them so? you made me jump.”

Lily made no answer: she had removed the shady hat, and was sitting over there on that low chair, pulling and tugging at the dogskin gloves, and thinking and planning how she should break her news to the calm young lady at the glass.

“ Aggie.”

“ Well.”

“ I have something to tell you ; will you listen ?”

And the dogskins got a final wrench, and came off altogether, now.

“ Well, what is it ?”

And the comb was gliding down the smooth soft hair, and the grave face was looking straight into the looking-glass.

“ I—I’m going to be married, Aggie. Jack, I mean Captain Dashwood, asked me to-day, and—and I said yes.”

The grave face had turned round now, and was looking in blank amazement down on the confused little figure ; and the white fingers were grasping the comb and holding it aloft in a most imposing manner.

“ Captain Dashwood—Lily, you must be joking, why—why we’ve only known him a week, I think.”

“ We have, we’ve known him more than a fortnight, nearly three weeks ; and—and it’s very unkind of you to talk like that, I wouldn’t speak that way to you if

you were going to be married," pouted the red lips; and Aggie felt a little contrite, for she knew as well as if it had happened how gladly that foolish little girl would join in all her rejoicings, and how those impulsive arms would cling round her neck, while words of encouragement and hope would come raining from the red lips, she knew all this, but she couldn't look blindly on into a golden future which she couldn't see; and her heart was troubled for this same impulsive little girl.

"Lilly, you mustn't think me unkind, darling; but I do think you might have known each other a little better first, a little longer, you know; it's a very serious thing, and if you didn't suit each other after all, what a miserable life it would be for you both."

"You don't care for anyone or you wouldn't talk like that; it's very hard that you should all be so hard and cross about it; I wish I hadn't told you; I—I thought you'd be glad with me; and—and you don't know how fond he is of me and I of him, Aggie. I—I'm very sorry——"

And here her tremulous voice broke down ; and Lily sat there the picture of despair, with her face buried in her hands, and rocking to and fro on the low chair.

“ Now, Lily, Lily ! don’t be foolish. Why, of course, if he likes you, and you like him so very much, you’re quite right to marry, and I’m sure you’ll get on capitally. There, I’m sorry I said so much ; I didn’t mean it, indeed ; if you’re happy, I am too, darling, will that do ? ”

And Aggie was on her knees beside the disconsolate little figure, trying to remove the hands from the troubled face.

“ Come, tell me all about it,” she said ; “ I can’t judge till I hear it all ; won’t you tell me ? ”

“ You don’t care to hear,” came from behind the sheltering hands.

“ I do, indeed ; and I know I was very unkind to say all that ; come get up, like a good girl, and come over here and sit on the sofa and tell me all your plans.”

So at last Lily was consoled and bright-

ened up a bit, and confided a few of Jack's many hopes and fears into that listening and sympathizing ear. The two hundred a year, and how they were to keep house and a dozen other things out of it. How that formidable person, Lady Georgiana Dashwood, had to be brought over to view things in an amicable light; and how, finally, it was to be broken to papa.

Aggie listened very patiently, she didn't attempt to contradict or throw a wet blanket over those happy pictures of the future, or suggest that, perhaps, the two hundred might, after all, just barely keep the wolf away, and certainly not pay for any extravagancies or luxuries; so she sat there listening and pondering, while the impulsive little heart was pouring out all its secret griefs and joys for her edification.

It isn't in the heart of any woman, I think, to be very hard on the foolish little love makings, and wild ruinous matches made by their friends; they may talk and shake their heads, and declare them to be most imprudent, but still in their

heart of hearts there is a kind of sympathy; they would do the same themselves to-morrow under the same provocation, be just as infatuated and foolish about some miserable little sparrow of a man, and see God only through his skinny person; they would fancy themselves ready to die of hunger or cold, or any other privation with pleasure for his sake, and never grumble, or sigh, or regret past comforts, if they might have that one of God's creatures all to themselves, to starve with and work, and live for. There was something of this sympathy in Aggie's heart, as she listened to that confused, happy narrative.

Her young hero wouldn't have been a bit less dear to her without his wide lands and comfortable competence, not a bit less dear with only two hundred a year to strive and battle on, and she was stroking the little hand in hers, fondly and sadly, it was quite natural that Lily should love her hero blindly and trustingly, if he told her they could live handsomely on ever so little; of course she believed him, she saw that dream castle with his eyes, and

thought only as he thought; and Aggie would have done the same herself; so you see my saint was rather a foolish girl too, had a sad hankering after forbidden things, and loved the world too well as yet.

“Well, darling, I’m sure you’ll be very happy;” and she kissed the low white forehead softly, and stroked the little hand again. “Very, very happy, I dare say.”

And these two romancing castle-building little girls sat on and on in that quiet room, adding stone upon stone to their enchanted fabric, planning and talking over those days which were far off as yet. On and on, till the voices in the house and village streets were still, till the candles on the dressing table were burned nearly down, and then there was a rapid undressing and hurrying into beds, and then there stole a silence and hush over that little room too, and the planning and castle-building was carried away to the land of dreams; where those two young souls were straying then.

The Captain had been confiding and

planning with his friend again; things didn't look quite so bright or hopeful to him; he had done a very foolish thing in asking this giddy little girl to link her fate with his, a very foolish thing; but he couldn't help it now, and he felt as most men do feel, having thrown their freedom aside and put on fetters, very much as if he was going to be hung, and he thought that he had been foolish, mad, in fact, in saying what he had said in the lonely little shed; but yet he did love that little girl, as he kept saying to himself over and over again, loved her truly, desperately, and couldn't have lived without her; so, after all, he had only done what scores of other enamoured individuals had done in the days gone by, and would do in the days to come; he wasn't a bit madder or rasher than they had been, or would be, that was one comfort, and if life could be made so much brighter and happier by having that little girl by his side, why shouldn't he have her there if she was willing to come?

He wasn't a man who had been much in the habit of denying himself any plea-

sure or enjoyment when it was within his reach, and this one had been tempting him and lying under his very nose for days and weeks now, and he couldn't deny it to himself; it had been growing nearer and dearer to him all those quiet days, and now he had it in his grasp to hold and keep for ever if he liked.

The Captain's love affair didn't interfere much with either his appetite or rest; things had gone too smoothly as yet, absurdly smoothly, and now there was nothing to prevent their marrying to-morrow if they liked; the old man would say whatever his silly little daughter wished, so she had told him, and Lady Georgiana? well, the Captain fancied that with a little firmness, that point might be carried too. So things looked, if not very bright, at least tolerably clear, and the two friends had agreed that with a little economy and pinching and saving, both ends might be made to meet, and then everything would be right. So, planning and talking too, these young men sat far on into the small hours of the night, and some grog was drunk, and several cigars consumed, and

then these two worthies betook themselves to bed, to dream of their several loves and hopes, and sleep as well as such anxious individuals could be expected to.

CHAPTER X.

TOM FOULKES TROTS OUT THE MARE.

THAT jolly good-humoured fellow, Tom Foulkes, who hadn't sat into the small hours of the night, planning and scheming for either himself or any one else, and had slept like a top after his maritime excursion, was up betimes and lounging about his overgrown gardens and barren lands. The state of things there looked certainly rather hopeless, there was twice as much groundsill and chickweed in the old garden as anything else; and the size of the cabbage leaves and artichoke stalks was something alarming, there was a growth of grass amazingly fertile and rich on the garden walks and avenue, and a terrible dearth of the same in the rocky deer park; there was an abundance of damp moss and ivy clinging to and growing on almost

everything it could possibly attach itself to, and the verbena and monthly roses were hanging and swaying from the trellised woodwork on the house wall, and their dead leaves were lying unheeded on the gravel walk.

It was a most alarming state of things and a mystery to the easy-going gentleman, how on earth the place, which had never been much of a place at best, had become in one short year so terribly dilapidated and overgrown. He felt provoked and contrite that he hadn't come down once or twice to see how things were going on in the old place, to look after that stupid old foozle, Robbins, who must be doting by this time, and never had been anything but a lazy good-for-nothing fool in his best days, he felt provoked and anxious, for what would his lady mother say when she came down to ruralize for a couple months, as she had announced her intention of doing; what would she think of the overgrown garden and damp looking house; how she would tell him that it just served him right for his imbecile, idiotic perverseness, in persisting in keep-

ing that doting idiot about the place; but he couldn't get rid of a strange hankering after old habits and old retainers; he couldn't find it in his heart to turn the useless old man out of his quiet little lodge down there, to banish him from the scene of his old labours and interests, it would have been too painful a parting to this soft hearted creature; and so the weeds and grass had gone on growing and spreading, and the dead leaves accumulating; but something must be done to make the house look habitable for the ladies, who were to arrive in less than a week.

Mr. Foulkes was standing with his hands in his pockets looking disconsolately round the garden, and up at the dusty windows and damp walls; he didn't know what to begin with or who to consult. "Better get some one to clean the windows and nail up those roses, that would make the place look a little livelier," muttered he; then he strolled on out of the garden, and turning down to the right, through an avenue of laurestinus bushes, and came on a small kitchen door,

which was standing open, he passed in, and stood in a low stone passage, with a flight of steep steps at the further end, and a row of doors down each side.

“Hullo,” he cried, and the tones went echoing along the passage and up the steps, and a dozen “hullos” answered back again, but there was no other sound.

“Nell, I say, Nell, do you hear?” and he kicked the old door with his heavy boot. There was a rustling on the stone stair, and in a minute more there emerged into the dim light an old, dried-up looking woman, who came slowly along as if she was in no hurry to answer those loud summons.

“Oh, here you are at last; where’s Robbins, Nell?”

“Well, I don’t just know, Mr. Tom; I think like enough he’s in the garden.”

“No, he’s not, I’ve just been there.”

“Then very like he’d be in the stable; he’s a’most always foustering about somewhere.”

“I wish then, with some of his foustering, he’d try and make himself a little

useful. I never saw such a state as the place is in."

"He's very old, Mr. Tom, very old, and ye can't expect much from him now, poor John."

"Oh, nonsense, poor John must stir himself a bit, and get some one to weed the garden and sweep all those dead rose leaves away; I don't want him to do it himself if he's not able."

"No, I know that, you were never hard, Mr. Tom; I'll tell him when he comes in. I was athinkin' myself as how the garden was gone a little wild-like."

"Wild-like, indeed, mad-like; but let's have a look at the rooms, Nell, the mistress and Miss Fanny are coming down next week, to stop here a bit, and I wouldn't like them to find things all at sixes and sevens when they arrived. It wouldn't do."

"There's nothin' amiss inside, Mr Tom, everything is put up safe and neat; and the rooms is kept clean an' fresh as ye'll find."

The rooms were clean and fresh, and there was no fault to find with old Nell's

part of the arrangement; and Tom roamed through them all, and gave his directions; and then paused on the stairs for a minute to say, "Very well, that's all right; and the servants will be down in a day or two, I suppose, so you'll see that things are done; and send Robbins to me, will you, when he comes in? I must see to the garden, it's in a shocking state; or stay, never mind telling him. I'm just going over to the manor to speak with Mr. Okedon, and I'll get him to recommend some one to me; that'll do."

So, having begun preparations, and found that things weren't quite as bad as he had thought, the relieved gentleman sauntered out into his grounds again. He paced quickly down the long winding avenue, grass-grown, with tall trees here and there at each side; and here and there a wide gap with the deer park and distant sea for a view; he hurried on, walking smartly. The manor was some distance off, a good long walk, so he must hurry, or Mr. Okedon would be out, that big fellow, with the long moustachios, would be sure to drag him

down to the village, and Tom chuckled to himself as he thought how very neatly the big man had managed his little game of the evening before.

“He’s a knowing dodger, by Jove,” murmured the amused gentleman, as he halted at the gate at the end of the avenue, and began fumbling at the bolts and chains. “Why, confound it, the old fool has locked me in,” he continued struggling still with the barriers; “it’s absurd, I declare,” and he stood irresolute before the big rusty gate. “I suppose I must,” he added, after a minute’s pause, “there’s no use in calling or shouting, he’s as deaf as a door nail.” So this stout comfortable gentleman actually began to climb the great gate, the rusty old bars creaked and groaned, and the gate swayed and bent in a most alarming manner; it was a very toilsome ascent to that fat person, and he arrived at the top very red and out of breath.

“By Jove, that’s hard work,” he sighed, as he sat astride on the peaked top, and prepared to descend. But there was a sound of horses’ feet on the road, and



Tom feeling that he was not in a very dignified position, made rapid efforts to descend. It might be the Jones's or any one, and he would look dreadfully foolish, sitting on the top of his own entrance gate, apparently only enjoying the view; it would seem a most unaccountable proceeding. It wasn't easy for the stout body to swing itself about so; and he had only just time to transfer his legs to the other side and turn his fat back to the road; they might not know him, whoever they were, and he bent his head lower as the sounds came nearer.

"Hullo, Tom! what on earth are you doing up there?" came laughing up from one of two horsemen who had halted before the gate, and were looking up in amazement at the stout figure perched on the top.

"Oh, it's you, Charlie, is it?" answered Tom, looking over his shoulder, and laughing. "I'm growing quite frisky again, ain't I?"

"Why, I couldn't believe my eyes when I saw you; I thought you were a scare-

crow, or something like that, to frighten the crows away."

"Ha! thank you for the compliment; but we have no crows here to scare; I wish we had; I envy you your rookery up at the mansion more than all the gardens and trees there; I think there's nothing so pleasant as the cawing of crows overhead."

"Are you going to sit up there muttering all day?" inquired Charlie. "Dashwood and I came down to see you and look at that new horse of yours, and this is the way you receive us, with the gate barred and bolted, and you sitting up on the top of it. Come down out of that and let us in."

"I don't think I shall ever get down, and I know I can't open the gate even if I do."

"Why?"

"Why, because that old idiot, Robbins, has locked it, as you see, and is nowhere to be found."

"Well, walk round and meet us at the back gate down here; I know it's open, for we passed it just now."

“All right;” and the stout figure began the descent at the far side, and arrived at last quite safe at the bottom.

“Go round and come up by the stable,” he called out, “and I’ll go up there and meet you.”

So along the grass-grown avenue he paced once more, rather angry, and very much put out. What on earth would Okedon think of this strange state of affairs, and what would that swell friend of his think, too? It was a shame—the idea of a gentleman being locked into his own grounds and kept a prisoner there, unless he chose to climb his own gates; who ever heard of such a thing? Robbins knew he was at home—must know; he had been home nearly two days now; and he felt a strong inclination to lay his big stick across Mr. Robbins’ aged back, for making him look so foolish before his friends. It was a good smart walk up to the stables, and Tom’s temper was not cooled by the time he arrived there.

“Williams,” he called, as he stood in the stable-yard, “Williams, come down here—look sharp. Have you got the letters?”

“Yes, sir,” answered a head protruding from the loft window above.

“How many?”

“Two, sir.”

“Bring them down, then.” And the stout gentleman leant his back against the wall to wait for his news.

“Here they are, sir—two.”

And Mr. Foulkes began the perusal of the first. “One hundred and thirty pounds indeed; I wish I had one hundred and thirty pence to throw away just now,” he muttered, as he tore up and flung aside the piece of paper. “What’s this, I wonder?” and he opened the other. “Oh, yes!” and he read on into the second page, “bring the Dashwoods down, indeed—pretty hole it is to bring any one into; I wonder at her not having better sense. What the deuce has made her take such a fancy to those stupid snobs? Here, I say, Williams, rub the mare down a bit, will you? there are two gentlemen coming up to look at her just now; and—and, Williams, did you see that old fellow, Robbins I mean, anywhere?”

“Yes, sir; he’s inside.”

“Well, send him here; I want to speak with him.”

And Williams disappeared to execute the commands.

“What the deuce makes mother so stupid?” he muttered again, as the stable door swung to after the retreating figure; “she knows as well as I do how I’m dipped just now, and she can’t expect me to be keeping open house here all the summer; but women never can understand these kind of things, and so the Dashwoods must just take pot-luck, and do as best they can down here, and the sooner they get tired of roughing it the better I shall be pleased;” thus soliloquising, Tom paced up and down his stable yard in no very pleasant frame of mind, waiting for the two horsemen who were just now in view to scale the hill and join him.

Captain Dashwood and Charlie had been vastly amused by their friend’s dilemma; and the novel idea of being locked into one’s own demesne had caused great merriment for these two gentlemen. It was plain to see that Mr. Foulkes’ *ménage* was

in rather an odd state; the place looked terribly neglected and overgrown, as they soon found on emerging from the little bridle path which they had been following into the avenue.

“Why, in the name of all that’s rotten and mildewed, doesn’t Foulkes get his place weeded?” cried the Captain, as they walked leisurely on in the direction of the stables. “It’s the most miserable looking hole I ever was in; is the house to match, I wonder?”

“Well, I can’t say; I haven’t been here for more than a year; but I shouldn’t wonder if it was; poor Tom, he knows no more how to keep a place in order than a fool; he just lets things take care of themselves how they will.”

“A cheerful kind of place to live in, I should think, plenty of company in the way of rats and mice, no doubt; there doesn’t seem to be more than a barrel of earth over the whole place.”

“How do you mean? It’s a tolerably large place, you know.”

“Oh, yes; but then, my dear fellow, consider all the rocks and stones and

sands in it; why, the other day when we went down shooting over there, it was just like a desert island, with the sea gradually eating it away; I should think if something isn't done down there near the beach the Foulkes' estate will have dwindled considerably in another ten years or so."

"Oh, sea or no sea, it's pretty sure to do that, I think."

"Why, is he so awfully hard up as all that?"

"I should think so; he's been living at the rate of a hunt for the last dozen years in the army, and hasn't got a rap in the world to pay his debts with, without selling this old place, which wouldn't fetch much, I fancy."

"And how is it that Fanny, the sister, you know, has got such a lot of tin?"

"Well, you see, she's a stepsister, and has nothing to say to the lands here; her father was well enough off, you know, and didn't leave Tom a farthing; they didn't get on well together."

"Oh, I see; but she's a Foulkes too, how's that?"

“Why, Lady Mary married two first cousins, do you see, and the first left Tom very comfortably off with a good deal to keep up the place; but he’s always been a fool, and got fleeced wherever he went, and he’s run rather tight now; but he’s a very good, jolly fellow, too, and the best natured creature in the world, and I’m sure he could get things all square in no time if he liked, by selling out and retrenching a bit; I wish he would, poor old fellow, he’d be much happier, I’m sure.”

“Well, I don’t think it seems to weigh much on his spirits, he’s always roaring, laughing, as far as I can see.”

“Oh, yes, I think he’s a very cheerful person indeed; look at him now over there, he looks rather down, poor Tom; he’s trying to square his book, I’m sure; look how he’s frowning;” and Charlie drew up on the grass before the yard gate, and they both looked down on the puzzled gentleman leaning against a tree, and scratching out and totting up with a pencil sundry mysterious figures.

“Hullo, Foulkes, what’s the latest news

from Tattersall's ; I suppose you're good authority, aren't you?" cried Charlie, laughing down on the puzzled face. "Anything going on in that quarter just now?"

"Tattersall's—oh, yes—yes, to be sure, I don't know, indeed ; but—but come along in, I've got the beast here, come on."

So, laughing still, the Captain and his companion rode over the grass-grown stones to the stable door.

"Here, I say, Williams, trot the mare out here quick;" and the two gentlemen arranged themselves to stand in judgment on Tom's beast. She was, as Charlie had remarked the day before, "a very neat little thing," light limbed and smooth coated, and the judges looked on approvingly, while Williams led her up and down before them.

"By Jove she steps well," said the Captain ; "stunningly, I declare."

"Yes, she's a showy little thing, isn't she? and the best of her is, she's as gentle as a lamb, no tricks about *her*. She could carry a lady beautifully,"

answered Tom, who was proud of his new purchase. "She's a good one to go too; I got her from Lyte's; you know Lyte, the guardsman, he used to ride her himself, steeplechasing, never did her justice though; I don't believe he knew himself how she could go if she liked till he saw her with me the other day down at Dodbrook. Hodgson rode her for me there, and by George didn't she step out just, and went at her fences like anything?"

"Why, didn't you ride her yourself?"

"I! why bless your soul man, dear, I'd look well going at anything, and on her too; I suppose I ride nearly double her weight now."

"You don't ride heavier than Lyte, do you?"

"No, nothing to signify; there's just a pound or two between us, that's all."

"Well, you said just now that he was an awful dab, didn't you?"

"What, Lyte a dab at riding, by Jove! I never said anything of the kind. I never saw him take anything in my life."

“How’s that?”

“Well, he always comes down this side of the first fence he goes at, that’s all.”

“Oh, that’s it, is it?”

“The first time I saw the mare here, he was riding her at —— you know, and of course we all thought he’d never clear the first; but by George she bolted with him like a shot and carried him clean over it, and then away at the next, and he sitting there like a log on her back. I never saw such a thing in my life, and I don’t know to this day how she did it, but she did, and just took the next, the cleanest shave I ever saw, and left him lying there all in a heap, not knowing where he was, or how he got there, and away with her again; that was the first time I saw her, and by Jupiter when I saw how she bolted with Lyte, I thought she’d do me, and I offered him a hundred for her after, and didn’t he jump at it too, for he wouldn’t have ridden her again in a hurry, I’m thinking, and that’s how I came to have her, and she’s cheap at the money too, for Hodgson offered me a hundred and twenty for her the other day

at Dodbrook, and I refused, by Jove I did, and I think I was right too."

And Tom, who was somewhat heated by the rapidity with which he had repeated his little anecdote, gazed fondly and proudly at his animal.

"Yes, she is certainly a very good one; a beautiful head and neck, and a clear bright eye; very good indeed," said Charlie, surveying still, and lingering behind the others, who had turned off across the yard.

"I say, Tom, where are you going? come back; look here; couldn't we try her somewhere down on the flat ground near the sea? I'd give anything to see her take the hedge there between the two fields; let's bring her down, will you?"

"All right. Yes, if you like; Williams can put her at it, and I'm dashed if she doesn't take it as clean as ever you saw a jump taken yet."

So these three sporting gentlemen took themselves off in the direction of the two fields lying close to the sea, there to see and judge for themselves how the mare

could go at her fences, and what she was made of.

We needn't follow them all that way, I think. We don't know the mare sufficiently to care very much whether she took the fence to their perfect satisfaction or not, and so we will leave them to enjoy the exhibition by themselves, having perfect confidence that the fleet-limbed little animal didn't disgrace her owner on that great occasion at least, and performed with as much grace and spirit then, for those few admirers, as she had done often before for scores and scores of other and harder judges.

CHAPTER XI.

TROUBLED WATERS.

THE course of true love never did run smooth, but Captain Dashwood's course seemed to be running tolerably evenly; the only hitch as yet was the uncertainty of Lady Georgiana's approval; but the Captain, though he would have regretted and been vexed by her declining to countenance the affair, still resolved within himself to keep firm, and stick to his engagement like a man; he knew her too well to think that she would hold out long against him, or quarrel with any of his plans for very long; he knew too well what pride she took in her handsome son, to discard him or leave him to his own devices in consequence of this new piece of extravagance, and yet he felt some qualms about it; it was the

greatest sin as yet committed, the most unpardonable to that worldly mother, he felt sure, and his heart sank, as he and Charlie and Tom rode along the quiet road from the Elms to Beaumanoir, some two or three hours later on this summer day, when they had inspected the mare, and seen her perform all her feats of agility in the field near the sea.

Should he wait and see his lady-love first, and ask her advice about the matter; but his heart told him that that foolish little girl wouldn't be much good at giving advice on this or any other subject, that most likely she would only confuse him the more; and so, very disconsolately he scaled the stairs at the manor, and reached his room as yet undecided what to do.

Lady Georgiana Dashwood must be made acquainted with her son's new piece of folly, and that foolish young man knew that he must break the news at once; it wouldn't do for her to come down and find him out; it would be so much better to write her a good penitent little note,

just to let her know how matters stood.

So in his quiet room the Captain sat himself down with pen, ink, and paper, and began puzzling his brains to concoct an ingenious epistle to conciliate the much-tasked old lady.

Several dutiful neat letters were begun and thrown aside; several new plans were made by which the announcement could be made the easier, and thrown aside also; it was a very hard task this breaking the news, and the Captain sat on and on, pondering and chewing the end of his pen in a sad difficulty.

It would never do, he told himself, to acknowledge himself too much in the wrong; he must put a good face on the matter, and be assured and bold about it; he had found by experience that to be much the best way of conciliating his irate parent; he knew he was foolish, but still he would be true to his folly; he had allowed himself to be ensnared by that discreet little syren, and he didn't object to his enthralled condition in the least; he had no intention of backing out of the imprudent love-match into

which he was plunging ; things looked bright enough just yet, and he felt no desire to shake off those pleasant fetters ; so a bold and short confession seemed about the best thing to be done, and he grasped his pen desperately, and plunged at once into the inevitable disclosure ; it was a very short little note, and he thought would do, as he read it over. It ran thus :—

“ My dearest Mother,—I am just writing a line to tell you that I am engaged to the dearest little girl in all England or Wales. I know it's very imprudent, and all that kind of thing ; but I don't think you'll blame me when you see her, which will be as soon as you come down here. Hoping you won't be very angry with me, believe me to be,

“ Your very affectionate son, .

“ JOHN DASHWOOD.

“ Beaumanoir, Llanaber.”

He felt relieved when this piece of news was safely sealed and directed, and on its way to the post ; there was no use in

delaying or trying to put off the inevitable; it was best done at once; procrastination is the thief of time, and there was no time to lose, for the party at the Elms were expected early next week, so his mind was easier when that load was taken off it, and the square envelope gone beyond recovery. After all, she couldn't say much, he must marry some time or another, and why not now; he was seven and twenty, and quite old enough to know his own mind; he couldn't always be at his mother's apron strings; he would make a bold effort and carry his way this once. It was all very well for the weak-minded old woman to pay bills and keep things square for him, but he could manage his love affairs himself. So this stubborn gentleman having settled that little business with regard to the news-breaking, sauntered out to join his host in the garden.

He strolled along among the roses and gooseberries, the currant bushes and roses, for the garden at the manor was one of those old-fashioned ones, to my mind the pleasantest and most cheer-

ful, where everything grew together in grand disorder, where there were no shapely beds and well-arranged colours, where the flowers all mingled and clustered how they would, and there was no attempt at separating or arranging them. On down, under the branches of apple-trees which were waving and twining over his head, looking this way and that among the thick leaves to catch a glimpse of the missing Charlie.

“Where can the fellow be gone?” he muttered, as he turned to look down the alley of trees behind him, and paused irresolute. He looked at his watch; it was just three—just three, and he hadn’t seen that fuzzy-haired little girl all day; it was high time he should wend his way down to the village; and he was beginning to grow rather impatient for his host’s appearance, when, just as he reached the end of the garden walk he heard voices behind him, and turning round perceived Charlie and Mr. Foulkes among the gooseberry bushes partaking of the fruit and conversing very quietly, with their mouths full of gooseberries.

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Charlie and Tom had been conversing on very interesting subjects. The owner of the mare had talked and descanted upon the many virtues and graces of that splendid animal for a long time, had then wandered off to other equally interesting subjects, such as the potato rot, and cattle plague, had enlarged and commented upon these grievances for a long time also, and had now somehow or another got on the subject of those two jolly little girls, with whom they had spent such a pleasant day yesterday. What relevancy there was between the potato rot and those two healthy young ladies didn't transpire in the conversation, but it came about naturally enough, and Charlie couldn't have said exactly where he left the diseased vegetables, and where he took up the pretty little Miss Fremantles; but here they were in the middle of a very exciting conversation on that agreeable subject, and Tom was anxious to find out how the land lay between their mutual friend and Miss Lily.

“She's a pretty little thing, upon my word, and a jolly little thing too; but I

think the other's a thousand times better looking, you know—more of a regular beauty, more soul in her face," mumbled the stout gentleman from under a gooseberry bush; "she's much the finer girl of the two, and I wonder our friend of the lackadaisical moustachios didn't fall in love with her instead."

"Why, I think the other's just as pretty," replied the artful Charles from under his ambuscade.

"Well, I don't. I've known the Fremantles all my life, and I assure you Agnes has far more in her than the other."

"Oh, I daresay. I don't know them well enough to have found out all that yet, and Lily seems to have twice her spirits; I only judge from appearances."

"Oh, you don't know them well, then?"

"No, I've only known them since they came down here, a couple of months ago—that's all."

"Oh, I see. Well, I've known them as many years as I have fingers, or more; and I was always spooney on Agnes as long as ever I can remember—she

was always the pole-star of my young affections, the personification of all that I thought good in a woman, my Egeria, in fact," and the stout gentleman gave a comfortable sigh, and began mumbling again.

"Oh, indeed; and may I ask is she still your Egeria, still the pole-star of your young affections?"

"Well, yes, and no—still my Egeria, and yet not still my pole-star; she hasn't lost any of her charms for me since then, but she's further off from me than she was in the old days, when we were together."

"How did you come to be so much with them?"

"Well, you see, when I was a young fellow I was a boarder in Cheltenham College for more than six years, and they were living there then you know, and old Fremantle was very kind to me too—very kind, and I used to go to tea there, and walk with them, and half live with them in fact for ever so long; and that's how it came about that I fell in love with Agnes; and, Lord bless my heart! how well I

remember when I was leaving what a state I was in ; it seems just like yesterday to me ; how I went to tea there the evening before, and we three, that is, Agnes and Lily and I, went and sat in the shade in the garden, and actually cried over my departure. I don't think I've ever been so miserable since as I was that night. They both gave me their photographs (Agnes was in remarkably short dresses then) and a lock of hair. I've got that bit of Agnes's hair somewhere in my desk, but I lost Lily's out of my pocket-book a short time afterwards."

More mumbling, and Charlie, not at all satisfied as to how this stout person still regarded his Agnes, whether she was still his Egeria or not, whether he had quite got over his boyish affection, or whether it was still smouldering in his heart, and ready to burst into a flame at any minute, munched and pondered too, and then, once again, under shelter of his gooseberry bush, hazarded the remark—

"Are you still in love with her, Tom?"

"Well, no, I think I've got over that,

thank heaven ; for I don't suppose she'd fancy me for an admirer."

"And why not, old fellow?" cried Charlie, immensely relieved by that announcement, and feeling very happy, and quite ready to condole with and patronize his disconsolate friend. "Why not? are you quite sure she doesn't care for you?"

"Well, I think so. I used to think she liked me long ago; but girls are so unfathomable in their likings and dislikings. Why, when I went to see them a couple of years after, just when I joined my regiment, she was as cold and stiff as I don't know what, and persisted in calling me Mr. Foulkes, when it had always been "Tom" long ago, and hardly spoke a word to me, and I just as fond of her as ever then. Could have cried with rage at her treatment; and I remember a locket I had brought to give her, with my photograph and a lock of my hair in it; I daren't have offered it to her, and it's upstairs now in my desk, and it has been the same ever since, and I suppose it's always to be the same."

“Well, well, old fellow, I don’t think it will break your heart,” laughed Charlie, more and more relieved, as he listened to his fat friend’s confession.

“No, I hope not; I’m very well as I am.”

“Very well indeed, I think; but she was talking quite friendly to you yesterday on board the yacht, wasn’t she?”

“Yes, I think so, for a few minutes. I’d like awfully to offer her that locket; I wonder would she take it; I suppose not; I’d better leave it alone.”

There was a silence for a few minutes; Charlie didn’t feel that he had quite solved that little mystery of his friend’s, but he fancied there could be only the one solution, the one answer—that that fat jolly fellow had a hankering still for that grave young lady, and Charlie felt uncomfortable and uneasy as he thought of that ridiculous locket; and how it might be offered any day to Miss Agnes, and perhaps accepted, and a wild idea flashed upon him; he would buy a locket too, and put his hair in it, and be beforehand with his unconscious rival; he would rush forward

and declare himself at once, before that mine exploded, and hear his fate for ever.

But a few minutes more and he had come to reason again ; he could watch her still, and see if he could solve the mystery in time ; so that long-suffering, patient, young gentleman went on munching and thinking ; till Captain Dashwood's step on the gravel walk called him back out of his dreams to the fact of there being other people who were also in love, and anxious, and troubled ; he felt an interest in the Captain's little love affair, and wished to hear what he had done with regard to the inconvenient old lady in London, and whether she was to be let into the secret or not, just yet.

“Hullo, Jack ! here we are ; where are you going to ?”

“I only came out to look for you ; what are we to do with ourselves this afternoon ? hadn't we better call and inquire how the young ladies are after their trip, don't you think ?”

“Well yes, I think so ; are you coming that way, Foulkes ?”



“No, I think not; I must be going towards home. I want to see to things, you know; and mind you send me up that fellow we were talking about, Charlie. The garden’s in an awful state.”

“Oh, yes; all right; we’ll walk with you as far as the cross-roads; it’s on our way;” and Charlie relieved again that he was to have this one more day of grace, took his friend’s arm, and the three men walked together down the hill, at the foot of which Mr. Foulkes bade them farewell; and then the other two hurried on, that they might not be late for the young ladies’ walk.

They were late, however, much to their disgust; the Misses Fremantle were gone some time; there was nothing for it but to submit, so they turned away from the familiar porch very disconsolately, in the direction of the billiard-room.

“I say, Charlie, now that I think of it, perhaps it would be better if I wrote a letter to the old fellow; I never could put in an interview; what do you think?”

“Well, perhaps so; write it in here, and leave it there now.”

So the Captain once again applied himself to the pen, ink, and paper, and wrote two other neat little letters—one addressed to R. Fremantle, Esq., and the other to Miss Lily Fremantle, into both of which epistles we decline to pry, as they are nothing to us, and concern only the persons to whom they are addressed. Then these two precious letters were deposited in charge of the butler at No. 1, Queen's Terrace, who received them graciously, smiling on the big figure, as if to say, "you'll do, sir; I'm quite willing to allow the thing to go on;" and, "we understand each other perfectly;" and the Captain felt somewhat abashed as he said—

"Will you tell Mr. Fremantle, please, that I shall expect an answer in the evening, if he would kindly send it to the hotel?"

"Yes, sir; certainly, sir; and this one, sir, any answer to this?"

"No—no; I think not; that is, I—I'm not sure, perhaps there is;" and the Captain fumbled with his umbrella in a manner so violent, that it made him quite

red and uneasy looking, and then turned to go with "good evening, thank you, don't forget, please," and sauntered off again to join his friend. This time the two young men didn't return to their billiards, but lounged quietly up the village street, and halted before the "Sporting Hotel." "Let's dine here, and then we can meet them afterwards, and take a turn on the Green, and go in to tea; shall we?"

"Very well, if you like; I'm quite willing; it will be rather an awkward meeting for you, I should say."

"Oh, I don't mind that at all; I rather like it;" and they both laughed as they turned into the dining-room. Captain Dashwood's patience wasn't tried very long, and an answer to one of his letters was lying beside him on the table before the dinner was half over; he took it up eagerly; it wasn't in her hand he was sure. It was from the old man then; and he tore it open and read it hurriedly.

"Oh, that's all right, Charlie, there, read; it's a very nice letter from the old

fellow; he's not half a bad old man after all. I wonder she didn't send me a line, cruel little thing; I'll have it out with her by-and-by;" and the Captain made quite easy by that quiet note, in which the kind-hearted old man had held out his hand to him, and welcomed him in an honest and grave way, as his little Lily's chosen husband. Charlie read the simple letter through and through, and laid it down thoughtfully, on the table, and they sat in silence, until the Captain, laying down his knife and fork, said—

"I tell you what; I want to buy her a ring, you know; is there anywhere here where they keep such things?"

"Oh, hadn't you better wait and send up to town for it?"

"Oh, I don't want to wait; I want to give it her this very evening. I want to put her in chains at once, you see; couldn't I get one anywhere here; they sell all kinds of things in that big shop up at the top of the street; let's try there?"

"Very well; come along then."

And they sauntered out once again into

the quiet street, and turned into the big shop. Here the Captain having applied for rings, a box full of very doubtful articles was displayed before him; he turned them over one by one; they were all too flashy and gaudy; the stones were too big, and the gold was too brassy looking; and one by one they were tossed aside.

"These will never do, Charlie. I'm afraid I must wait; it's a nuisance all the same. I'd have liked to have had it to-night; it would have been so deuced neat—wouldn't it?"

"Yes; but these things would never do, I'm afraid."

"Is it something for a lady's wear, sir?" inquired the vendor, who began to suspect the big moustachioed gentleman's designs; "because, if so, I think I have a little article would suit exactly."

"Well—yes. It is something in that line; let's see the thing."

"Here it is, sir—a very neat little thing, indeed, sir. You see, a bunch of Forget-me-nots, tied with a little band of gold, in a true lover's knot—a very nice

design. Might that be something like what you were wanting, sir ?”

“ Yes—yes, I think so. I say, Charlie, look here ; this will do beautifully, won’t it ?” and he held up the little toy exultingly.

“ Yes—thanks ; that will do, grand. Put it up, please ; I’ll take it with me.”

“ Thanks, thanks, very much. Come along, Charlie ; it’s getting rather late ; let’s be getting on to the Green quickly ;” and the two gentlemen quitted the shop, and retraced their steps down the street, past the two little ivied towers of the castle, and down that picturesque turn to the right.

“ I think the fellow suspected me ; what do you think, Charlie ?”

“ I think he did.”

“ It’s a very neat little thing, all the same, and I’m glad I have it ; she’ll like the idea of my thinking of it so soon ; don’t you think so ?”

“ Yes, I’m sure.”

“ And I can get her lots of grand ones when I go to town you know.”

“Yes, of course.”

And they walked on to the close grass, the Captain looking this way and that, up at the windows of No. 1, Queen’s Terrace, along the Green, along the beach, and sands, and finally along the pier.

“There they are on the pier; don’t you see?”

“Yes; so they are; come along.”

And the Captain’s heart beat quicker as they hurried on towards those two little figures sitting on the wooden bench at the end of the pier. Nearer and nearer they came, the Captain’s heart thumping faster and louder, and Miss Lily’s rosy cheeks growing redder and hotter as he approached. What an awkward meeting that was on the lonely pier in the dim evening light, and how those little fingers trembled as he held them in his big strong hands; what a very awkward meeting it was, and how hard the Captain found it to begin a conversation with those confused young ladies; how he chewed his moustachios and shuffled his feet about, and what desperate efforts he made to clear

his voice, and try and address some one. Aggie's powers of making a conversation for every one, and never being put out, didn't desert her now, and after that one confused shaking of hands and shuffling about, launched out at once with—

“What a lovely evening it is; isn't it, Mr. Okedon?” and, “I'm sure you must be surprised at finding us here all alone so late, but papa will join us in a few minutes.” What wonderful tact and coolness that young lady had to be sure, and how quietly and calmly she took possession of Charlie, and led him off to look at a big lumbering boat which was drifting by the end of the pier. How kind and thoughtful it was of her to give the Captain an opportunity for taking that trembling little hand in his, and holding it there while he asked that cruel little girl what she meant by not answering his little *billet doux* of this evening. There was no one to remark how very close he was sitting to the little figure on the bench, and no one to hear the foolish, reproachful speeches which were being poured into her ears; it was a very



quiet, retired little seat, just behind the sail-house, close against the wooden rail, which was the only protection against their tumbling over into the blue water.

Charlie and Agnes had sauntered on down the pier, "to look for papa," very likely. And these two young persons found themselves once more alone on another little wooden bench, sitting close together; were all their tête-à-têtes to be held on wooden benches Lily wondered; why couldn't they stand or walk sometimes, she thought; did it require a wooden bench always to inspire that big individual with those tender speeches; couldn't he have made love at all without that little plank to assist him? But she didn't mind sitting there in the dusk now, half as much as she had minded sitting beside him on either of those seats of yesterday; she was beginning to grow accustomed to having him always sitting into her pocket, and beginning to like it too, for she sat there very quietly listening to his deep voice, and looking into his eyes, and bearing very patiently to have his strong arm circling her once again.

Then how he got possession of her hand, and slipped the little ring of Forget-me-nots on her trembling finger, she didn't know; but when she looked down it was there, and the little blue stones twinkled and glistened through her happy tears, and it all seemed like a dream, when he bent his handsome head over it and kissed the little hand. What a seal of love and hope seemed set there, what a new deep well of happiness was opened before her as he drew her to him, and held her close to him in the dim light, held her there nestling and hiding against his heart the happiest little girl in all Wales that evening; and the light grew dimmer and darker as they sat talking in their quiet corner, and the far off stars were looking down on them from the dim sky, and smiling up upon them from out the dark water where they were reflected; and the minutes went slipping by unheeded, flying, flying, all too quickly, bearing away with them so much of love and hope, so much of the happy past, so much of light and sunshine.

CHAPTER XII.

SONGS AND VOICES.

It seemed very hard to have to go among those prying eyes in the drawing-room, to have to enter with such flushed cheeks and bright eyes before the assembled tea-drinkers. Mr. Fremantle was in the study, and would be glad to see Captain Dashwood for a few minutes, and then those two remained closeted for some time, while Lily, blushing, timid Lily, had to stalk into the room alone, and face not only Agnes and Mr. Okedon, but, oh, of all people in the world, that dreadfully penetrating jocose Tom Foulkes ; what pains she took to appear at her ease, and pretend that it was the cold night air which had made her cheeks look so red and hot ; and, oh, what pains she took to conceal the suspicious little ring of Forget-me-

nots from those vigilant eyes ; but she wasn't a good actress, and I'm afraid only made herself more conspicuous by such vain attempts at carelessness and easiness.

And Tom Foulkes, being a clear-sighted individual, soon penetrated into her secret, and understood those blushes very well before long. What a long long evening it seemed to Lily. What could Jack have to say to the old man that took so long in explaining ? And she sat in the open window, looking out into the dark night, thinking on and on of that big handsome man, of his fond passionate eyes and deep voice—thinking of every word he had said to her on that quiet pier. It didn't seem real yet ; it was too much like a dream, too like a beautiful happy dream to be true ; and the big blue eyes were looking up dreamily, wonderingly, with that far-off look in them, at the twinkling stars and quiet moon which was sailing slowly among the dim clouds above her head, looking up thoughtfully, forgetful of all save that one bright dream, forgetful of the prying eyes and tea and

toast, forgetful of the laughing and talking, unheeding Tom's jokes and laughter, sitting over there in a waking dream, looking most awfully sentimental and stupid to those cheerful tea-drinkers at the table.

"A penny for your thoughts, Miss Lily," said Tom Foulkes, coming over and sitting down beside her on the lonely little window-seat.

"I wasn't thinking of anything," replied she, looking up and laughing; "I was only looking at the stars and the moonlight on the water."

"And very sentimental objects, too; how lackadaisical the poor old moon looks sometimes, doesn't she?"

"Yes," laughed Lily, again; "but the stars don't look particularly melancholy, do they?"

"No; they're jolly little things enough, always winking and blinking and smiling down on us so cozily. I like the stars; there's something lively about them."

"Well, I've got a kind of affection for the moon, too."

"Ah, but then you're a fickle young

lady, you know. There's a new moon every month, and if you go on transferring your affections from one moon to another, you must be fickle. Don't you understand?"

"Oh, yes; to be sure. I forgot that."

"Whereas they're always the same stars, which shows how constant I am."

"Oh, I see; but even if the stars were to change, I don't suppose there would be much difference in the new ones. The moon's always the same moon to me."

"What! when it's only half a moon you like it just as well as when it's a whole one?"

"How foolish you are. I won't try to explain what I mean; you're too dull to see it."

"Not a bit; but I don't understand exactly. Suppose, now, just for argument's sake, you were to find that the moon was made of green cheese instead of silver and light, would you feel just as romantically attached to her as before?"

“I don’t know, I’m sure; but really this is the most absurd conversation I ever heard, and I won’t try to explain my feelings with regard to the moon or stars any more to you. I see you can’t understand anything so prosy or strange, so we’ll talk more rationally. How did you like the trip yesterday?”

“Oh, I liked it very much indeed; and how did you like it?”

Their eyes met. Lily couldn’t help it; she had to laugh outright, he looked so absurdly knowing and jolly.

“Yes, I thought you did. I’m very clear-sighted; I saw it all in a minute; but really, joking apart, I like him very much. I think he’s a gentlemanly fellow, and I suppose I may congratulate you, Lily. We’re very old friends, you know, and I shall be very glad to see you happy and settled and all that kind of thing, very glad indeed; and I know you won’t be angry with me for saying it; but upon my word I do feel very glad, and I congratulate you with all my heart.”

“Oh—oh, thank you, Tom, thank you;

I know you mean it, and—and I'm very much obliged to you for saying it; but—but you won't mention it to anyone just yet a bit; it's—it's not quite settled yet, you know; but I'm glad you like him, and thank you all the same, Tom."

There was a silence for a few minutes, during which time Miss Lily had time to recover herself, and she said, turning towards him again—

"Why don't you get married, Tom? I'm sure you are quite old enough now."

"I don't know," he said, looking down.

"I don't think I should like to marry; I haven't found it so easy to forget the old days."

"Tom," she said gently, and she laid that soft little hand of hers on his arm, "are you still fond of Aggie?"

"I don't know; I think I am."

"Is it only thinking, then?"

"It's better so; isn't it?"

"I don't know; why should it be?"

"Why should it be? Why you know as well as I do how fond I was of her then, and how she used to snub me and quarrel with me always; how the more

I seemed to like her, the more she seemed to dislike me."

"That's two years ago. We haven't seen you since then till yesterday."

"Two years! so it is. I'm a great fool not to have forgotten her in all that time, ain't I?"

"No, I don't think so at all. Oh, Tom, you know how I wish to see her married to you, you're such a good old fellow; I know you'd be so kind to her."

"Do you remember," he said, still looking down, "that time long ago when I first confided in you all my troubles, that day that we spent at the cottage; do you remember how I told you then that I could never tell her anything about it till I was sure she liked me? I was only a boy then, Lily, but I think I was right, don't you?"

"I don't know; I think she liked you then; I told you so often."

"Perhaps she did; but she doesn't now, that's plain."

"Why don't you try?"

"Because I know it would be useless

now; I've nothing to offer her in the world, I've been such a fool about everything—such a fool;" and he struck his clenched fist on the window-sill. "I must only learn to forget her—it's what dozens of others have had to do—to live without her. I suppose I shall go on as I have been going, with no object in life, no hope to look forward to, nothing to make me a steadier or better man; go on with my debts and follies sticking to me always, and no one to lighten the burthen. It's not likely she would care to take me with all my faults, and poverty clinging to me and hampering me at every turn. It wouldn't be fair to ask her; it wouldn't be right; and—and don't talk to me about marrying, Lily; I don't want to think about it."

She was silent. She had nothing to answer to that impetuous speech. Perhaps he was right. They mightn't be happy after all, and of course Agnes could judge best for herself whether she liked him or not. It was better to leave it to time—leave it to that time far off, when hopes long cherished should be realized,

and the troubled waters stilled for ever.

Agnes was sitting at the piano, cool and fresh-looking as usual, in her soft white dress and smooth bands of golden hair, and the nimble fingers strayed over the notes carelessly. She was trying to remember some song which that long, ungainly young man at her side had heard her sing some time ago, and wished to hear again, and her soft eyes were raised to his every now and then inquiringly.

Oh, my little saint, how much moral courage you are in want of yet. Where are all those wise resolves made yesterday over that piece of tangled wool? Where is the firm will that was to shake off this day-dream, and leave you free and happy once again? Gone, blown away over those troubled waters, forgotten and cast aside.

"I can't remember, really." She was saying. "Are you quite sure it wasn't this?" and she played a few bars of a song.

"No; oh no, it wasn't that—it was something about a name, I think."

"The name; oh, of course—yes, I know

what you mean—this,” and she played and hummed a few more notes.

“Yes, that’s it; will you sing it—it’s such a jolly song?”

And he sat down on a low stool close by, and listened, with his chin resting on his hands. He didn’t know much about music, I think, or didn’t see any great difference between one song or another, but somehow this one had struck him and he liked it. Aggie had a sweet thrilling voice, with a clear ring in it, a sweet low voice, and the song suited it exactly, and very plaintive and sad sounded that melancholy little ballad to those two listening over there. It was a farewell—a long farewell to old loves and hopes, and Tom heard every one of the sad words—heard every one—and his heart echoed them back again. There were tears in Lily’s eyes as the music ceased—idle tears which she couldn’t account for—half of joy and half of sorrow; she was so happy on that evening, so foolishly happy, hugging her new treasure in her heart.

Oh, why is it that every joy is so near a sorrow, every hope so much like re-



gret? Why is it that in all our pleasures there is something of pain for ever blending with the joy, and embittering the sweetest things? Why is it that those idle tears will swell into our eyes unconsciously, unbidden, rising from our foolish hearts, and falling we know not why? Lily was a very impulsive little girl, too much given to the melting mood, easily stirred by anything sad or sorrowful, always ready to condole with and weep for any one's troubles and sorrows. Some one says, I forgot who just now, that the truest natures, like the truest metals, are always easiest melted. It's a very true saying, I think, and Lily's was one of those natures, always ready to sympathize with any trouble. Tom's faithfulness touched her. She liked him so well, had such a happy remembrance of those old days he had spoken of, that the tears which had been very near her eyes all that time, now swelled and filled them to overflowing.

They were sitting side by side, silently listening to that clear voice, with those foolish tears still glistening in their

eyes; for Tom Foulkes, too, had been moved by the song, when the door opened and Jack Dashwood looked in upon them. There was surprise and amusement in his happy face as he saw his little *fiancée* sitting so calmly by the side of that fat mournful young man in the window, look so sentimental and foolish. Captain Dashwood didn't feel a bit jealous or angry at finding those two together, as he would have done yesterday. He had too much confidence in the trusting little girl, as yet, to fancy that she had any other than a friendly feeling for that stout young man, and he smiled down on her very approvingly as he drew near.

Tom had too much tact not to perceive that his room would be far more acceptable than his company to his little confidant just then, so, muttering something about asking Miss Fremantle to favour them with another song, he shuffled off, and left his share of the seat to Jack.

Here was another *tête-à-tête* on a bench. It really was very ridiculous, but Lily was getting quite accustomed to it now, and sat on there very happily looking out on

the quiet sea and moon with that big romantic fellow by her side, who liked the sea and stars awfully, and had also a strange fickle affection for the silver moon. Other songs were sung in that thrilling young voice, but there were no tears shed over them, and I'm afraid that selfish little girl in the window had forgotten the old days and Tom Foulkes, forgotten his loves and sorrows in a very heartless way, and had slipped away into her new dream again quite naturally.

CHAPTER XII.

LIGHT AT LAST.

THAT dutiful little note of Captain Dashwood's travelled up to the great metropolis with the usual speed, and arrived at its destination just in time for the rather late breakfast in No. — Park Lane. It lay there on a bright salver beside her ladyship's plate and knife and fork, just as that other little note in the same handwriting had waited some three weeks ago; and Lady Georgiana, who hadn't heard since from her naughty boy, pounced rather eagerly on the square envelope, and broke the seal.

"I hope Jack's not thinking of coming away just as we are all going down," she said. "It would be so pleasant to have him there."

Caroline was standing beside her mother

all this time, waiting to hear the contents of the letter. She didn't much care whether the Captain remained at Llanaber or not; it was nothing to her, but she did wish to see him married to Fanny Foulkes. It would be such a good connexion, and such a capital match for the penniless young spendthrift, who was such a burthen on the family just then, and she waited rather anxiously to hear the contents of the letter. Lady Georgiana glanced hurriedly at the short little note. It was plainly written, and those few words were easily read; but she held it before her long after she had read and understood the Captain's piece of news—held it there before her, not seeing it, or thinking of it, incredulous, thunder-struck—and her hand trembled so she could hardly hold the piece of paper.

"It isn't true—it can't be true, Caroline; read it to me; it's some mistake." And she held out the letter to her daughter. Caroline glanced over it, and she, too, felt shocked at the news; Jack going to be married, poor good-for-nothing handsome Jack going to be married

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to some silly little country miss; going to throw himself away on some unknown, penniless little girl, while there was a young lady, desirable in every respect, pretty, fashionable, and an heiress, only waiting for that big, foolish young man to advance and claim her; she saw it all as she looked at the cool, neat little note; she knew at a glance all the pains he had taken to concoct and write it; she knew at once exactly how he had felt just then, she had felt the same herself; had felt that the only way to fight that battle well, was by coolness and sternness, by carrying the weak-minded old mother by storm; and Caroline held the ominous letter in her hand silently; she couldn't call out upon him, or condemn him; she was just as great a fool herself, and she stood holding the paper and looking into it sternly and with knitted brows and closed lips.

“Mamma, I think some one ought to write to Jack; I'm sure he has been trapped by some low people,” and Caroline laid her hand on her mother's arm and bent gently over the bowed head.

“Shall I write, mamma, or will you?”

Lady Georgiana raised herself and looked up at her daughter. Oh, what a care-worn old face it was that looked up then, so faded and pale, with such a life of trouble and anxiety written in the wrinkled forehead and anxious eyes.

“I will write,” she said, and she stood up from her seat, and her hand trembled, oh, so nervously, and she took the letter from her daughter: “I will write to him; he can’t be so mad, such a fool! It must be some mistake. Give me the letter, Caroline.”

“Mamma, wait a minute, wait and think what you are going to say to him; a great deal will depend on this answer of yours; you must lay it all before him, and tell him that it must not be; mamma, dear, wait just half an hour, and we can talk it over up stairs.”

And Caroline took hold of those two trembling hands and held them in her own firm ones, while she spoke. Lady Georgiana had great confidence in her eldest daughter’s advice and foresight, and generally allowed herself to be ruled by that

strong-minded young lady very quietly, and she stood there looking blankly into the earnest face, and only half hearing those quick spoken words, but she didn't try to disengage her hands from that firm grasp, she was thinking in her own mind, what she would write to that troublesome son of hers, thinking of all she would say to dissuade him from this mad folly.

"Caroline, let us come up now, and talk it over; let us write to him at once; Jack is so impulsive and hasty, it would be safer to do it now; tell me what to say to him. Oh, Carrie, Carrie, what shall I do?"

"We'll manage it; don't think about it, mamma; he must give it up, he can't be so foolish; he has nothing to live upon; he'll see how impossible it is if you lay it all before him quietly."

"Oh, yes, he must, he must give it up; he can't be so very much in love with her, he's only been there three weeks, I think, and—and goodness knows who she is. Jack was always such a fool about girls, he has been in love so often, but it never came to this; he never proposed for any

one yet, and those kind of people are sure to make a fuss and stick him to his word."

"They're some vulgar designing creatures you may be sure, for Jack generally knows how to manage his love affairs very well, and never got himself into a scrape before, though I'm sure he flirts more than any other man I ever saw."

"Well, perhaps he'd be very glad to be helped out of this; and I dare say we'll manage it, for I couldn't bear to see him married to a stupid little nobody of a creature, when he is so handsome and clever; my poor boy, he's always in some trouble or another."

And Lady Georgiana sighed as she thought how remarkably afflicted by debts and other worries her poor boy had always been. It never struck her that he suffered more in this way than most young men, had heavier bills and debts to pay than other young dragoons; every young gentleman had a certain amount of wild oats to sow, her ladyship knew, but she did not know that Captain Jack had sown more of that unprofitable seed than most other young gentlemen; had got

into more scrapes than other young fashionables, and was one of the most extravagant young fellows about town.

She only knew how penitent and remorseful he had been, scores of times, over those follies; how sorry and repentant he had been over every one of those past offences; and in her heart she forgave him for all, forgave him for the sighs and tears shed over his head so often, forgave him for the bitter heart-burnings and sorrowings of those old days, forgave him all, and was quite ready to forgive him as many more if necessary; but this new sin was greater, more unpardonable than all the rest, and if once committed, repentance and remorse were useless; and that forgiving old lady, who had been so ambitious for her handsome young prodigal, determined that if he once took unto him this penniless little girl, he might from thenceforth waste his substance how he would; she wouldn't help him, wouldn't even let him partake of those husks—those stray pounds which he had fallen back upon so eagerly of yore; there should be no more fatted calves killed for him then, no faithful for-

giving heart should go out to meet him, even were he to repent ever so truly and bitterly; no, from that time forth he should be an exile from his comfortable home and loving heart—an exile for ever.

But it should be all his own doing; she would write and tell him all this, and then, if he chose, with his eyes open, to choose the ineligible young lady he might do so; and having satisfied herself that this was the right and just course to pursue, Lady Georgiana ascended to the drawing-room to write that important warning to the Captain, her son.

It was a very sensible, earnest letter, composed principally by Caroline, and written by that young lady, but containing nevertheless several fond, foolish speeches from the doting mother, who wouldn't have written too cold a letter to her darling, and slipped in those one or two little endearments to soften the hard common sense of the rest.

How those few fond little passages smote on the Captain's heart, as he read his long home-letter next day in the quiet, in the garden summer-house at the manor;

how true and kind they seemed, and what a chord was touched in his heart as he read the dispirited, urging words, "I know you'll give up this foolish affair for my sake—for my sake, who have always loved you so." And he sat holding the paper between his fingers, in the quiet, reading the anxious words. He knew she was right; it was madness, folly; and that still small voice within him was crying out yet to be heard, was warning and disturbing him.

I think it would have been better if Caroline had allowed her mother to write that letter after her own heart; I think those few entreating passages went nearer and deeper into the Captain's troubled heart than all the upbraidings and warnings conveyed in the rest; I think Caroline didn't understand that unruly nature half as well as did his mother; I think she over-shot her mark in her eagerness, and only irritated him.

"This is Miss Carrie's doing," he muttered, as he glanced angrily down the page. "Poverty and wretchedness indeed. I'd like to know about how much Mr.

Arthur Miles can boast of just at present ; she's a good person to be preaching and lecturing, I'm sure—better learn to look after herself a little better ; she hasn't done so much for the family that she need crow."

And he laughed to himself rather bitterly. Caroline didn't understand how to deal with this very unmanageable young man at all, and I think that all that talk and pother only made his weak nature cling the closer to his love, only strengthened and fortified his heart against all persuasion. But he was touched by his mother's little appeals, he didn't want to grieve that fond heart if he could help it ; she had been so good and true to him all those years, and he ran over in his mind all her faithful blinded love for him from the first, how she had petted and spoiled him so dreadfully when he was a tiny fellow in bibs and bare legs, what countless little offences were overlooked and winked at even then, and what a troublesome brat he must have been ; and the Captain sighed, and wished that he had been well chastised in those days, and

taught more forbearance and patience; and again, how she had protected and sheltered him against his father's wrath later on in those young days, when the young scamp was expelled from Eton, how she had carried him off from an impending flogging to a quiet little sea-side hotel, where they two had sheltered till the storm blew over; he ran over in his mind all the wild promises and vain resolutions he had made there to that believing forgiving mother, and how they had all been cast to the winds and forgotten since; how there had been wailing and weeping over his unworthy head, when once again the incorrigible young scamp had been rusticated from Oxford; there had been no angry father then to chastise the offender, the same patient heart had gone out to meet him, while he was yet a great way off, had paid his bills, and taken him off on the Continent till that storm had blown over also, and how had he repaid all this loving kindness?

Not at all; he had always been a burthen to her, a trouble, and now he was going to give her yet one more wound—the

cruellest of all, to her worldly heart; for no one knew better than he the schemes and hopes she had had for him, the plans and dreams which he was to realize; no one knew better how she worshipped and loved him in spite of all his faults, but he couldn't give up his little fuzzy-haired, blue-eyed girl even for her—she must forgive him even this sin, also, and take that little penniless girl into her heart as part of himself, as the good new part that was to redeem all the rest, and reform and remodel his wandering passions.

He sat there a very long time in that quiet garden, thinking and pondering over all this, and his mind was troubled about it; he saw no way out of his new dilemma, but to give up this vain dream of love in a cottage, love on two hundred a year, with butchers' and bakers' bills to be paid out of it, and those foolish debts still hanging over him, for the Captain had committed one or two little indiscretions as yet unconfessed to his lady mother; had one or two troubles which weighed considerably on his heart, and

didn't tend to make that picture of the future look any brighter.

So there seemed no way out of this foolish mess but one, and that one way the Captain was resolved not to take, and he crushed the piece of paper in his hand vehemently, as he thought how impossible it would be to give up that blue-eyed little girl, crushed and tore it into pieces, cast it to the winds, and sat there very moodily and unhappily, for he hadn't expected all this opposition, and was confused and baffled by it.

"What a fool I was to mention it," he muttered, as he stood up and looked sulkily down on the mossy ground. "She would have waited any time; I know she would—she's the dearest little thing in the world; but I'm in for it now, and I shall have the whole lot of them down on me in no time, preaching and bothering. It's too bad, only for Caroline I could have managed the old lady as easily as anything. I'd like to know what the deuce it is to her whether I make an idiot of myself or not. She's the most interfering, confounded, insolent fool I ever met; and,

by Jove, I'll pay her out for it too ; setting the old lady's back up with her bosh."

And Captain Dashwood kicked the gravel before him savagely, as he strode off in the direction of the house. He looked very ill-tempered certainly, as he entered the dim hall, and confronted Charlie, who was emerging from the library, very ill-tempered and sulky-looking ; and Charlie, who couldn't help remarking these signs of the Captain's state of temper, thought it best not to inquire into the contents of the letter which he had seen conveyed out to the garden, and which the Captain had promised to read to him when it arrived.

Captain Jack stood there with his hands in his pockets looking rather defiant, and as if he were saying mentally, "Come on," and dreading, I dare say, Mr. Charlie's inquiries about the letter and its contents, he wished, I think, just then, that he hadn't made quite such a confidant of that young man ; he was ashamed of the way in which his woman-kind had displayed their mercenary intentions with regard to himself, and some of

those earnest appeals of Caroline's were ringing still in his ear, and making very discordant music there; but he had torn the beseeching agitating letter to pieces, that was one comfort, and now he might tell Charlie just as much or as little of the contents as he pleased.

"Well, old fellow, I've heard from home to-day," he said, rousing himself, and trying to look as if that hearing had been rather pleasant than otherwise.

"Oh, indeed; and what do they think of your proceedings?"

"Well, they don't seem particularly well pleased; I think they fancy I'm throwing myself away, and all that kind of thing, you know, and I dare say they're right, too."

"Why, you don't mean to say you're beginning to regret it so soon, Jack?"

"Oh, no—not to regret it at all—but you know, Charlie, it's only natural that they should expect me to do something better."

"Well, I don't know what better you could have done; she's a dear pretty little thing, and seems fond of you too, and you

might wait some time, I dare say, before finding anyone half so nice."

"Well, I can tell you I know two or three young ladies just as pretty, that I might have for the asking to-morrow."

"I dare say; but that's nothing to the point; you don't care for any of them, I presume, and you do care for Miss Fremantle, which makes all the difference."

"Yes, you're right there, I do care for her, and very much too I can tell you, or I wouldn't be in such a hurry to marry her against all advice."

"Then they don't approve of it."

"No; how could they? and I'm sure they're right; but you needn't look at me that way, Charlie; I'm not the least shaken in my intention; I intend to stick to my foolish love affair; I'm not the least inclined to back out of it, and I'm quite satisfied that I couldn't do better than marry that pretty little thing just for simple love, and I dare say I shall be a thousand times happier than if I was spliced to Miss Fanny Foulkes, or any other fashionable young lady; so you needn't look so glum, old fellow, I'm not the least uneasy about

my affairs, and I can manage them pretty well without their assistance, I'm sure," and he laughed a little bitterly to himself.

"Well, I'm glad to hear you say so, Jack, and if you really like her, as I think you do, you're quite right to stick to her through thick and thin, and not to be turned aside from your purpose by any talk or nonsense; you've given your word now, and don't break it, Jack, or you'll repent it some time or another."

"Yes, I think I was right to ask her, and I'm sure we'll get on very well, and you needn't be afraid, my dear fellow, I'm not a bit sorry I have committed myself; I wouldn't undo it this minute for all the world; and I'm fonder of her than of my mother and sisters, and the whole lot of them put together."

"That's right, sir," and Charlie shook his friend's hand laughingly, and they walked over to the hall door, and stood looking out into the sunlight side by side.

"Yes, I love her better than the whole wide world, better than everything, and I'll never marry another woman; and

all their talk only makes me love her more, makes me determined to be true to her always."

And his dark eyes looked deeper and more passionate as he looked out into the light, and his voice trembled as he spoke ; and Charlie thought better of his friend then than ever he had done before, and gave him credit, I think, for more determination and firmness than was to be found in that reckless young man's composition, and they stood there in silence looking out on the fair view of green trees and waving grass, looking out into the golden sunlight, and seeing light at last.

CHAPTER XIII.

GUESTS AT THE ELMS.

THE time seemed to go very, very slowly to Lady Georgiana Dashwood, that week seemed longer than any other she had ever passed; she was so uneasy and anxious about her prodigal, who had not deigned to answer her appealing letter, and of whom she had heard nothing ever since; but the long wished-for day for the emigration into Wales had come at last, and Mr. Foulkes had received intimation that his guests were to arrive on this very evening with which my chapter opens, and the lumbering old family coach had been turned out for the occasion, had been scrubbed and polished up, and two of Tom Foulkes' horses attached to it, and it was just now waiting outside the A—— station to receive the travellers, and convey them to the Elms.

Presently the train came steaming and puffing down the line, and finally drew up at the station, and then there was the usual hustling and bustling about, and then the stream of passengers came pouring out into the open air, and Williams, the coachman, who had been on the lookout for his mistress, perceived that lady surrounded by countless other ladies, standing in the middle of the platform haranguing the porters in general and no one in particular, and indicating various large square boxes, and gesticulating frantically after various small ones, which were being pulled and dragged in different directions. It took some time to collect all the luggage and dispose of it on the top of the 'bus bound for Llanaber, and it took some time also to dispose of those six ladies in the carriage; but finally the lumbering old vehicle was put in motion, and Tom's beasts had a good pull of it up the hill. I don't think any one of those six well packed ladies enjoyed their drive in the close dark carriage along the shady winding road; they were none of them very comfortable or happy, and Miss

Foulkes seemed about the only person in any humour for talking; that young lady seldom kept silence long on any occasion, and she was just now in a very good humour, sitting jammed well in between the two Miss Dashwoods in the front seat of that roomy old coach.

“Thank heaven the train business is over,” she said with a sigh, as they laboured up the steep hill at the top of the town. “How I loathe the dust and dirt of the English trains.”

“Yes, I dislike the train, too. I think it’s equally disgusting anywhere,” answered Caroline; and then the party relapsed again into silence, and Miss Foulkes had to content herself with peeping out into the light, catching glimpses of trees and mountains through a very small aperture which served for a window in the family coach.

“I wonder Tom didn’t come to meet us,” said Lady Mary, breaking the silence once again. “But I suppose he had something else to do. He told me in his last letter that we weren’t to expect to see the place looking anything better than just

tolerable just now. He found things all at sixes and sevens when he came down, and he hasn't had much time to get them into order since ; but it really is all his own fault, he's one of the most harum-scarum creatures in the whole world ; and goodness knows, my dears, he may not have remembered that we shall want beds to sleep in to-night, or dinner to eat," and she laughed a comfortable little laugh from her dark corner.

"What a cheerful picture you are drawing, mamma," broke in Miss Fanny again, "let us hope that Tom isn't quite such a goose as all that."

"I dare say we shall be very comfortable," said Lady Georgiana from her corner ; "and I'm quite anxious to see the old place. Are we far from it now?"

"We're about half way, I think." And then the party fell back again on their thoughts, and no other remark of any consequence was made for the rest of the journey.

They were all relieved I think, as the carriage drew up at the tall iron gate at the entrance to the Elms, and more and

more relieved as they drove slowly up the winding avenue. They couldn't see much of the place through that small square window, but what they did see looked very well, with the dying light of a very bright golden sunset gilding the leaves and grass around them. Tom had made superhuman efforts to get things into order before the great day, and had succeeded so well that his remarking parent didn't perceive any change in the old place since her last visit there.

Tom had put his own hand to the plough, and had actually helped to weed and rake those overgrown walks and beds himself; had, with his own busy hands, nailed up the straggling roses on the house wall, had trained and placed them so artistically, that they now made a very thick fresh coating over the dusty old walls, and twined themselves very charmingly round the windows. Tom Foulkes had even surprised himself with his new changes and improvements; it wasn't the same dismal dilapidated old house upon which he had looked so hopelessly a short time before; but a comfort-



able cozy looking habitation on which the setting sun fell brightly as those six weary females looked out of their stuffy coach upon it.

Tom was at the door to receive them and help the six ladies out of the carriage. He had a cheerful word to say to each, and a cheerful smile for all, as he ushered them into the drawing-room, where things also looked wonderfully fresh and cheerful, and where the sunlight fell through the open window on bright chintz covers, and white muslin curtains,—fell on a rather faded Turkey carpet and on a rather dingy white watered wall-paper, where Miss Fanny Foulkes, in water-colours, smiled down vaguely on the curtains, and carpet, and chintz covers. Miss Foulkes in water-colours was not the Miss Foulkes whom people met at balls, and flirted and danced with. She was not the arch, saucy little girl whom men thought such fun and whom girls disliked and feared—not at all the same; it was a charmingly innocent soft little face which was smiling down from out that dingy-gilt frame on the drawing-room wall—a charmingly soft,

meaningless young face, with very red lips and black hair, and liquid dark eyes, gazing dreamily down.

"You're earlier than I thought," said Mr. Foulkes, standing under that smiling face and speaking to Miss Dashwood cheerily.

"Are we?—I didn't know," she said. "It seems to me as if we had been travelling for days—I hate travelling so."

"Well, that's all over now, for some time at least, and I dare say you're glad?"

"Very; I should like never to have any more of it—I'm tired of it."

"You've travelled about a good deal in your time, haven't you?"

"Yes, indeed, and there's nothing I hate more."

"Come up and let us see what rooms Mr. Tom has appointed for us," cried the vivacious Miss Fanny, linking her arm in Miss Dashwood's and pulling her off.

"I haven't appointed rooms for anyone—I left that to old Nell's judgment," said Tom, laughing as the two young ladies left the room. "I only hope they're all

right. It was a great responsibility to leave on one wretched bachelor—wasn't it, Lady Georgiana?"

"I don't know that; I think if we're to judge by the drawing-room, we're likely to find ourselves tolerably comfortable, Mr. Foulkes," answered her ladyship, as she followed her hostess up the staircase.

Dinner at the Elms was a solemn ceremony on this same evening, and Tom's cheery jokes and stories fell rather flat. The Dashwood family were certainly a rather dull family, and the dinner in No. —, Park Lane, was generally a very dull meal indeed, where every one eat his dinner silently and ploddingly, and where Lady Georgiana, looming stately and frowningly at the head of the table, seemed to cast a shadow over that festive board, and where everyone seemed to be eating and drinking in a dream, and brooding over his or her several secret griefs and troubles. So Tom found it rather hard work entertaining his guests, his little sallies were received so very blankly and coldly by those three silent Miss Dash-

woods, and so solemnly and dryly by that pompous old lady at his side. And Miss Fanny, who was also oppressed by the blank faces, and who didn't think it worth her while to try and help that much-tasked brother of hers to rouse those drooping spirits, sat looking very moody and *distract*, and glancing out into the sunlight outside, which fell on a thick yew hedge and gravel walk, thinking, most likely, how dull it would be straying about this stupid old place for the next two months, ruralizing. So the stories and jokes began to flag considerably, and the clattering of knives and forks and other utensils went on undisturbed; and Tom felt relieved when that solemn meal was concluded and those silent females had retired to their sanctum, the drawing-room, and he was left alone, with the biscuits and decanters, to sip his wine in peace, and stare out blankly on that golden-tinted yew hedge and clear blue sky.

The tea-drinking at the Elms that evening was not so dull by any means. Miss Fanny was moved to exert herself, and



play and sing for her guests' edification—to play the rattling, soulless old galops and waltzes which they had heard dozens of times before, and to sing those animated piquant little ballads which were so oppressively familiar to them; but even these were welcome now, and seemed to thaw the ice a little, and make the young ladies more at home in the dim drawing-room, and Tom found that, with a little perseverance, way might be made, and those three silent tongues loosened; and town news and gossip was soon flowing pretty freely among them, and Miss Dashwood was just now sitting on the chintz-covered sofa with Tom by her side, talking very freely and eagerly, with that fair young water-colour face smiling down perpetually on her unconscious head, and she was saying—

“But when did you see him?”

“Yesterday, I think, I met him walking along the low road;” and Tom looked rather quizzically down on the Turkey carpet, and smiled to himself.

“Oh, indeed, you know him I suppose.”

“Yes, oh yes, I met him a short time ago; he’s stopping with Okedon, isn’t he. You know him, I daresay? a very nice young fellow. We went on a yacht-
ing expedition a short time ago; that was the first time I met your brother.”

“Oh, I see, a pic-nic party; were there many?”

“Well, let’s see, there were the two Miss Fremantles, and—”

“Who are they, now?”

“Oh, they’re two very jolly little girls who are stopping near here. But do you mean to say that Captain Dashwood has never mentioned them to you?” and Tom smiled down again on the faded carpet.

“Oh, I daresay he has; I quite forget. But tell me, what are they like? I may know them. Where do they come from?”

“Well they come from Cheltenham, but they’re stopping here for the summer. Very nice little girls, indeed. I wonder you haven’t heard of them before. I fancied that Captain Dashwood was very intimate there, I don’t know though.”



“Oh, Jack always makes friends with every one. I suppose by this time he has got up a regular flirtation with one of them, or perhaps both,” and Miss Caroline looked inquiringly into Tom’s face.

“Well, I’m not at liberty to say, but I fancy he does admire one of them a good deal; but perhaps it’s only to amuse himself that he walks so much with them; very likely he’s only flirting as you say.”

Caroline made no answer. Mr. Foulkes musn’t be enlightened into that little slip of Jack’s, there was nothing to be gained by telling this good-humoured gentleman anything about the new family grievance. So she sat looking straight before her into the dimly lighted room and maintaining a grave silence.

“How well your sister sings,” he said, looking across at that slight little figure at the piano. “Wonderfully well! She has got such a powerful sweet voice; I like listening to it—it reminds me so of Miss Fremantle’s singing; it’s very sweet.”

“Miss Fremantle, oh that’s the young

lady we were talking of just now, isn't it?"

"Yes, the eldest one, a very nice girl indeed."

"And is she the young lady whom Jack admires so?" and Caroline laughed a little carelessly.

"Oh no, that's the younger one."

"Does she sing too?"

"No, I don't think so."

"Does she work, or draw, or paint, or do anything useful or ornamental? You see I'm beginning to take an interest in Jack's new flame. I want to know all about her," and Caroline laughed again.

"Well, I don't think she does anything very useful; she's just a pretty, idle, affectionate little girl."

"Well, I'm afraid that would never suit poor Jack. I think his wife ought to be a very useful energetic person, who would quite rule him, and keep him to his P's and Q's; but a pretty foolish little girl would certainly be the ruin of him—they'd never get on together. I know Jack so well, he's such an irresolute, careless, extravagant fellow; they'd be sure to live beyond

their means and get into all kinds of messes at once."

Caroline didn't perceive in her eagerness that she was giving her handsome brother a very doubtful character to Miss Foulkes's brother, a character which wouldn't exactly tend to make that young man anxious to have such a good-for-nothing scamp for a brother-in-law; but she was too eager and anxious to hear all about that interesting little girl to think much of what Tom might think, and she went on saying—

"They'd be so reckless and ignorant, I know they would, and Jack has only a very little of his own to spend—indeed what he has doesn't half keep him, he's so very extravagant; and you know mamma will never forgive him if he marries a little nobody of a creature, with no money or connection, or anything to recommend her; it would be so dreadful, wouldn't it?"

"Well, I don't know; I suppose, of course, it would be a great thing if he did make a nice match, and all that kind of thing; but the Fremantles are very good

people. Mrs. Fremantle was one of the Haughtons of Haughton, Cheshire, you know, and Mr. Fremantle's a very gentlemanly old fellow; but there's no money I should say, at least not much."

"Oh, I don't mean that money is every thing; of course it's a great point, and I'm not so romantic as to imagine that people can live on love, and have no butcher's bills or rent to pay; and yet I don't mean to say that I should like to see Jack marry any one simply for money. I think that's the worst thing any one ever did; it's always sure to end badly."

"But you think that if one could combine the two it would be all right."

"Yes, that's what I mean."

"That seldom happens, I think."

"Very seldom."

"For my part I'm inclined to think that love is the great thing after all, and that if people have just enough to keep the pot boiling tolerably well they need never repent having made a romantic love-match; what do you say?"

"Well, yes, I suppose you're right;

but you know the pot can't be kept boiling without a little money, and really, Jack has only just what buys his cigars and keeps his horses, and half pays his tailors' bills. If he was steady and cautious, I should think it the best thing he could do; but really, as it is, I think it would be the ruin of him."

"I don't know that at all. I'm romantic enough to believe in the reformation of even such a spendthrift, and I don't think you could do better than just let him have his way this once, and marry the young lady if he wants to."

Caroline had been more confidential than she had intended, and had let Tom into that family secret quite by accident in her eagerness, and she didn't know what to say just now. It was better, then, to make a confidant of him at once, and let him into all the particulars of the little business. He knew a good deal of the world, and had some common sense, that was plain, and Caroline determined that he should be enlightened completely.

"Well, you see Jack has got himself engaged, or something of the kind, to this

very little girl, and mamma won't hear of it, and Jack must either throw over that ridiculous engagement or have a regular blow up with her."

"Oh, I see, it's a regular case then, by Jove!" and Tom smiled to himself again.

"Yes; but Mr. Foulkes, may I rely on you that you won't mention it to any one, not even to Fanny; he may get out of it yet, and mamma would be so angry with me if she thought I told you."

"Oh, certainly, I shan't mention it—oh, dear no; but I'm glad you told me, for they're great friends of mine, those little girls, and—and when is it to be?"

"Oh—I—I don't know exactly," and Caroline felt rather baffled. Great friends, indeed. Then she had only been telling this stout gentleman a piece of news which he had known some time most likely—had been calling on him to lament over and condemn that very little girl who was such an old friend of his, and in whom he no doubt took a very lively interest; so there was no use confiding in him any more, their interests lay in

different directions, and their ideas on the subject were quite at variance.

Mr. Foulkes was somewhat amused by Miss Dashwood's confusion. He didn't want to be made a confidant of, or forced to take arms against the helpless little girl down in the village. If Captain Dashwood tried to back out of his romantic love-match, Tom wouldn't think any better of the Dashwood family in consequence; so he sat on the chintz-covered sofa, turning all this over in his mind, and waiting for his companion to make a new remark. That young lady not seeing her way very clearly, and having been, as it were, thrown on her back by that announcement of Tom's, was silent too, and they sat side by side, looking across to the group at the piano. Miss Georgiana Dashwood was just now favouring the company with one of those thrilling, passionate Italian songs which were such favourites of hers, and her clear rich voice was swelling up, in its powerful sweetness, over the other sounds in the quiet drawing-room, and stirring up those vain dreams in poor Tom's heart.

Hers was one of those voices which can haunt and thrill us always—one of those voices which can steal and creep into our hearts, and cling to us always through all our lives, through all time; and he was looking over at the slight little figure at the piano, not seeing it, or thinking of it, but hearing only that strange sweet voice, which was to be henceforth the music of his life, to take the place of another voice which was dying out in his heart, to catch up the echo and swell it there for ever; and he sat beside the silent young lady on the sofa, with a lackadaisical expression once again on his jolly face, and a very hopeless feeling working still at his heart.

CHAPTER XIV.

CROQUET.

CAPTAIN JOHN DASHWOOD didn't feel particularly well pleased as he thought of the invasion of well-meaning but troublesome relations, who were making a 'descent upon him in his out of the way quiet little Welsh village. He didn't feel very amicably disposed towards any one of those four ladies who had accompanied Lady Mary and Miss Foulkes down to the quiet country house by the sea the day before. He had his battle to fight with one of them, but he was determined to fight it like a man, and whatever he did, not to give in to the absurd entreaties which he knew would be poured upon him by his anxious mother, and he was sitting on the stone balustrade which faced the red brick front of the Manoir, dangling his

legs over it, and looking out lazily upon the familiar scene of green and blue.

“I must go and do my manners,” he said, turning to Charlie, who was leaning on the stone railing and looking out also on the green slopes and far-off sea. “It’s a confounded nuisance, that’s one thing I know. They’ll be all looking as glum as mustard-pots, and gaping at me as if I was the greatest blackguard on earth—I know so well the way they always go on,” and Captain Dashwood knocked those dangling heels against the stones very savagely.

“They came yesterday—didn’t they? Yes, to be sure. Oh, you’d better put a good face on the matter, and walk boldly into the lions’ den to-day.”

“Well, I suppose so; but it’s not a very pleasant idea, my dear fellow, facing the four of them, Caroline being a host in herself.”

It had to be done—this visit to the Elms had to be made to-day, whether the Captain liked it or not, and he and Charlie dawdled over the morning very stupidly—in the garden smoking, in the stables

examining Mr. Okedon's horses — about the farm and corn-fields, seeing how things were getting on there. It was very stupid work for Captain Jack, who didn't know the difference between a fat pig and a lean one, and who didn't in the least care whether the corn was cut this month or the next. But there was nothing else to be done, and Mr Charles Okedon saw plenty of things to interest him in his well-stocked yards and wide fields, and couldn't understand that indifferent feeling of the Captain's ; so they had loitered about all the morning, and it was just two now as they sat on the cool balustrade, looking out on that pleasant view—just two, and the Captain had agreed to make that grand descent at half-past two, and they were only waiting there for the eventful moment to arrive.

"We'll ride," said Captain Dashwood, looking round again ; "the horses will make a good excuse for not staying long. We can say we are going to exercise them a bit, or something—can't we?"

"Very well ; if you choose to lay that sin more on your conscience, I'm willing,

but if I were you I should much prefer having an explanation at once, and hearing all they had to say before you let another day pass. Don't you think so?"

"Well, perhaps, yes; I suppose I'd better run the gauntlet at once, and have done with it; so come along."

"We may as well ride—all the same—as we can come home by the village after, you know."

"Very well."

And a few minutes more, and these two young men were riding along the shady low road, at the back of the Manoir, in the direction of the Elms. Captain Dashwood's heart was beating very quickly, as they rode under the iron gate and up the shady avenue, and he was wishing—oh, how fervently—that that impending interview was over, and that he and Charlie were back again in their comfortable old red brick house. It was a good long ride up the shady avenue, and it was some time before the sombre front of Tom's habitation came in sight. There was no golden sun to-day to light up the dingy building, or gild the roses and ivy leaves,

and it looked dull enough as these two horsemen came riding up under the tall trees.

The ladies were at home, and so the two horsemen had to dismount, and follow the solemn butler into the dingy hall. A minute more, and the drawing-room door was thrown open, and "Mr. Okedon, Captain Dashwood" was thundered out in the stout butler's most imposing bass voice, and Mr. Okedon and Captain Dashwood found themselves in that same dimly lighted drawing-room where Tom had sat listening to impassioned Italian ditties the evening before, with those same washed-out chintz covers and faded carpets, and with that insipid young water-colour face smiling down an eternal smile on their heads also. There was a rustling of silks as the two young men stood in the doorway, and a stout elderly female, with a round, rosy, happy face, held out her hand to greet them as they came into the room. You needn't be told that that jolly, smiling old lady is Tom Foulkes's mother. She is Tom all over, wanting only his suit of gray shooting clothes and

black moustachios. She has his kindly smile on now as she holds Charlie Okedon's hand in hers, and she is looking up at him with Tom's bright dark, laughing eyes.

"How are you, Mr. Okedon? It's an age since we've met—isn't it?—quite an age," and she smiles up again on the big figure, for Charlie is a great favourite of hers and a very old friend. "And how are you, Captain Dashwood? It's an age since I've seen you too," and she holds that other big hand in hers for a minute, and looks up into his face also; but he is not one of her favourites; he is not half so handsome in her eyes as that other young man at his side, and she doesn't smile half so sweetly on him.

Lady Mary is the only occupant of the chintz-covered drawing-room. "The young ladies are all out playing croquet," as she informs her visitors, "and Lady Georgiana is suffering from one of her bad headaches, and is just now lying down in her room."

"But you'll stay to dinner of course," she goes on to say, "Lady Georgiana will

be down then I dare say, and it seems a pity to rouse the poor thing yet, even to see you Captain Dashwood, for she is getting a little sleep just now, which will do her good."

"Oh, yes, of course, don't think of rousing her for me; we can call to-morrow and see her," and Captain Dashwood felt immensely relieved that the evil day was put off.

"Call to-morrow! Why you're going to stay to dinner, of course, Captain Dashwood; you'll see her then, you know."

"Oh thanks, thanks; but I'm afraid Charlie and I are—that is we've brought the horses over, and I'm afraid we couldn't manage to stop away long; what do you think, Charlie?" and Captain Dashwood gave his friend a very entreating look across the room.

"Well, I don't know—I suppose—we couldn't manage it, I think—we'd better not," murmured Charlie, who wasn't a very good hand at framing excuses, and who didn't know what to say.

"Oh, nonsense," cried Lady Mary;

“the horses shall be taken good care of, and Tom will be so angry if I let you go without seeing him.”

“Where is he to-day?”

“He’s gone over to A—— to see about the horses, they were to come down to-day; but he’ll be back early in the evening, and he would be so sorry to miss you if I were to let you run away before dinner.”

“Oh, thanks—thanks, very much, I’m so—”

“Oh, don’t say another word; but wouldn’t you young gentlemen like to join in the croquet outside? Yes, of course you would. How selfish of me to be keeping you in here, talking to a stupid old woman, while there are four young ladies, who I am sure will be very glad to see you both. There that’s the way, Mr. Okedon—you know it I think—down by the yew hedge. Yes, that’s it? good-bye.”

And she waved her hand to the two retreating figures.

Down by the yew hedge tramped the two gentlemen in search of the croquet

nymphs; it was a very long thick yew hedge, with a gravel walk running alongside of it—the same hedge and walk upon which Tom had looked out from among his glasses and decanters so very moodily the evening before.

There certainly had been great weeding and scraping, and the moss on this walk at least had quite disappeared. The yew hedge had been clipped, and the straggling monthly roses had been nailed and tied up against the wall; but still the little ovals and squares of beds which should have been so trim and neat, were sadly disorderly and overgrown, and the fair blow of pinks and marigolds were spoiled and choked by the tall thistles and nettles which were mingling with them, and bending them over with their heavy weight. Here was a poor little struggling plant of blue forget-me-nots, beaten down and hidden by weeds; here was a handsome rose tree, unsupported by stake or bass mat, swaying here and there in the breeze unheeded; here was a large square bed of red geraniums, untrimmed, unkept, and overgrown too, blown this

way and that, and the little red flowers were hanging their poor little dishevelled heads disconsolately, as Captain Dashwood and Charlie Okedon passed quickly on.

I don't think Captain Jack perceived the state of things in those little garden beds. I don't think he remarked the smothering forget-me-nots or dishevelled pinks and geraniums; he was staring before him down the gravel walk, with his hands in his pockets and the end of his long moustachios in his mouth as usual; but to Charlie there was something of sacrilege in this neglect and desolation. It was a real pain to that young country gentleman to see those broken rose trees and dilapidated flower beds, and his quick experienced eye detected every one of the intruding weeds, which were choking the timid struggling little flowers, and he was frowning down impatiently on the wilderness of overgrown plants beside him.

On still they tramped by the yew hedge and flower beds, till an arched opening in the thick green wall showed a close-mown green plot of grass, with

a dozen white painted little hoops all studded over it, and countless little coloured balls lying here and there on the soft green mould. Captain Jack and his friend passed under this arch of green yew, and stood all at once in the presence of those four croquet nymphs of whom they had come in search.

It had been a very dull game that those four young ladies had been engaged in—a very dull game, wanting both spirit and interest; and they had been knocking the little coloured balls about very recklessly among the little whitened hoops, and had not been feeling much interest in that sham battle, where Caroline and Fanny were holding their own against Julia and Georgie, and those two intruding gods were hailed rapturously as they appeared under that green arch in the yew hedge.

“ Oh, Jack, is that you ? ”

“ How are you, Mr. Okedon ? ”

“ I’m so glad to see you, Jack. ”

And Captain Dashwood had to submit to be well mauled and hugged by his affectionate sisters before he could get

time to turn to Miss Fanny, and take that neat little glove of hers in his big hand and look into her pretty piquant face with his handsome eyes.

“Why, it’s an age since we’ve met,” he said, detaining the not unwilling little glove—“quite an age; and how are you, Miss Foulkes?”

“Oh, I’m very well, thanks.”

“You needn’t tell me you’re very well, I never saw you look more charming,” he said, looking down steadily on drooping lids and long dark lashes.

He was accustomed to pay very broad compliments to that young lady, and she was quite accustomed to listen to them, and so there was no blushing or simpering at this new one; and Miss Fanny stood there under that steady fire from those dark eyes quite at her ease, and bearing it with the greatest composure.

They both forgot, I think, that Mr. Okedon and the Miss Dashwoods were unacquainted with each other, and were just now standing looking on at that tender little meeting in silence. If Charlie had been any other man in the

world, I think he would have broken the ice for himself, and opened fire with those three gaping young ladies ; but he wasn't gifted with much coolness or self-possession, and he was standing among those balls and hoops, looking very much put out and awkward.

"Oh, by Jove ! I forgot. Caroline, this is Okedon, you ought to know him ; here, I say, Charlie, these are my sisters."

And Mr. Charles Okedon actually found himself shaking hands with the three gaping young ladies, and exchanging very friendly greetings with them, and those sunburnt cheeks of his were very red, and the gray eyes were bent very modestly on the green grass.

"Yes, I think we ought to know each other, Mr. Okedon, I've heard so much of you from Jack," Caroline was saying in her low, calm voice. "It seems so odd that we should never have met before, doesn't it?"

"Yes, very ; but I hope we shall be good friends now that we have met."

And the big ungainly figure swayed and rocked itself about, and poor Charlie,

though he had just held out his hand, as it were, to Jack's sister, didn't feel very much as if he could ever be very great friends with that handsome cold young lady, who was eyeing him over with calm clear eyes, and waiting for him to make some new remark.

"Let's make a match," cried the vivacious Miss Fanny, who had broken away from the Captain's affectionate greetings, and was nestling close up to Caroline just now. "Mr. Okedon, you and I and Caroline can play the rest; shall we, Caroline?" and Miss Fanny's arm was linked affectionately into Miss Dashwood's.

"Yes, if you like; but will that be fair—you are so good, Fanny, and we don't know how Mr. Okedon plays?"

"Oh, I think we're about equal," said Charlie, laughing; "we haven't had much practice."

"Well, then, let us begin. Here, Captain Dashwood, stand here with Julia and Georgie. Now then, Mr. Okedon, will you begin, or shall I?" and Miss Fanny fluttered about among the balls and hoops, chattering and contradicting, and

ordering every one. "There now, smash blue, Mr. Okedon, he's very troublesome—send him over there near the hedge; there, that's it," and the saucy black eyes flashed a very impudent glance at the owner of the hapless ball.

"You're very cruel, and I shall remember it to you," he said, as he followed his poor little roqued ball over to the hedge.

"I'm only paying off old scores," she laughed. "You've been knocking me about this ever so long, and I won't stand it."

There seemed to be a good many old scores to pay off, if one might judge by the persistent way in which Miss Fanny's red ball followed and roqued that helpless blue one, and Captain Jack spent most of his time standing over against the yew hedge.

"No spooning, Jack," said Charlie.

"Now leave me alone," cried the Captain, who was standing close to Miss Fanny, and looking on approvingly. "Don't send me off, old fellow. I've been battered about at such a rate that I

haven't made one of those three side hoops yet. Leave me alone, will you?"

"Well, I shall leave him to you, Miss Foulkes; you play before him, don't you?" and Charlie glanced over at those two standing by the hedge.

"Yes, leave him to me, I can dispose of him."

"Mayn't I dispose of myself?" asked the Captain, standing very close to the saucy young lady, and speaking softly. "Couldn't you trust me to dispose of myself?"

"I wouldn't trust you in anything," she said, giving him one more saucy glance, "not even in the disposing of yourself, as you call it; you'll be sure to make some blunder over it, and make a bad choice."

"I don't know that," he said, smiling to himself. "I think I might manage, just once, to make a lucky fluke, and hit on some one, on whom I could dispose of myself with safety. What do you think?"

"I don't know, I'm sure; but here, it's my turn now for a good knock."

“No, you won’t send me off, will you?” and the big supplicating eyes were bent again on that pretty face.

“Well, I don’t know; you’ve been so teasing and cruel all the game that I think you deserve to be well battered about;” and the vicious little mallet was shouldered, and Miss Fanny marched off to the scene of action.

That game was very exciting and interesting, and there was a good deal of laughter and squabbling over it, and the young ladies thought it very pleasant and exciting, and it came to an end all too soon for them. It was past seven as the six croquet players turned towards the house along the gravel walk by the weeds and broken flowers and tall yew hedge. Captain Dashwood was flirting shamefully with that little black-eyed girl, and they were a long way behind the others on the gravel walk, talking and laughing, and dawdling along slowly.

What a different person Captain Dashwood was to-day, with his sisters and this charming little flirt for companions. What a very different person he seemed

to Charlie from the lazy, indolent Captain Dashwood, who had dawdled about the farm this morning, talking over his loves and hopes. What a different person from the grave, earnest, devotional chevalier who walked so demurely and contentedly beside that blue-eyed, trusting little girl down in the village? This gay, flirting noisy young man wasn't the same Captain Dashwood at all—was much too talkative, and rollicking, and boisterous. Charlie didn't understand it, but it was just what the Captain had told him a few short weeks ago, that "a fellow had to talk differently to almost every girl"—that was all; but Charlie couldn't help wondering whether Miss Foulkes would have been dissatisfied if there had been less laughing and noise, and more of the grave devotion which Charlie knew Captain Jack could assume if he chose, but it was nothing to him how the Captain behaved himself, so he tramped on in silence by that cold, silent Miss Dashwood's side, past the flower beds and weeds and green yew hedge, and up to the gray stone-house front, with the monthly roses twining

themselves round the solemn arched door.

More and more did Charlie marvel at his friend's proceedings as they all assembled once again in the chintz-covered drawing-room later on, on that same evening. Captain Dashwood had changed his mind about riding home before dinner, and had actually accepted with much apparent pleasure Lady Mary's renewed invitation, he had continued to carry on that most unaccountable squabble with Miss Fanny, who happened to be placed next him during the comfortable meal. Dinner at the Elms this evening was a very much livelier meal than it had been the day before, and Mr. Foulkes's jokes and sporting stories were received much more brightly and attentively than on that other occasion. Lady Georgiana's headache was still raging, and kept that lady confined to her room, and so the Captain was spared as yet his much-dreaded interview, though he knew that it was not far off, as his mother had intimated her desire of seeing him alone in the invalid chamber after dinner, and Captain Jack was drink-

ing a good deal of sparkling champagne to give him courage, I dare say, and was chatting very volubly to Miss Fanny, no doubt, to show how very indifferent he was to the coming battle.

Lady Mary was looking doubtfully at those two sitting there talking so loudly. She didn't see half the tender looks, or hear any of the soft nothings which Captain Jack was breathing into her pretty daughter's ear, but she knew pretty well how very attentive he had been to that young lady all last winter, and she didn't care to have the flirtation carried on any longer; she wasn't at all anxious to have that handsome young scamp for a son-in-law; she didn't like him—she didn't know why; he had never done anything particular to forfeit her good opinion, but she didn't like him. She had no particular reason for forming that dislike, but like the other unreasonable human being who had a strange unaccountable antipathy to the well-known Dr. Fell, she couldn't like that handsome face over there. We have all our Dr. Fells, I think. We have all felt that unreasonable feeling with re-

gard to some one in our lives. We look on some calm, cold, classic face, meaningless and impassive, and we feel this unaccountable dislike of the regular pale features and meaningless liquid eyes; we hear a low, calm voice, and see a perpetual vague smile, and they only strengthen the feeling with regard to one respective Dr. Fells, and we cannot subdue it, or make ourselves feel a bit kindlier to that unimpassioned face. She couldn't explain it even to herself, but Captain Dashwood was not a favourite of hers, and she would have done her best to prevent this flirtation going beyond a flirtation, and felt uneasy at the idea of those two young people being so much together. But Miss Fanny knew how to take care of herself very well, her mother knew, and wasn't likely to throw away her young affections in too great a hurry on any man; so, perhaps, it didn't matter; that little flirtation would wear itself out soon. Fanny would be sure to see some one more to her fancy, and then handsome Captain Dashwood would be forgotten at once.

So Lady Mary turned her thoughts

from those two noisy young people to Mr. Charles Okedon, who was sitting beside her. Charlie was a great favourite of hers; those kind gray eyes and bright, soft smiles of his had quite won her heart long ago, and she liked talking with the sensible young man very much.

“How are things going on at Llanaber, Mr. Okedon? Well, I hope. We’re quite strangers here now, you know.”

“Oh, much the same as they always go on, I think—creeping very slowly, you know.”

“And how are all the pigs and poultry up at the manor?”

“Oh, very well, thanks.”

“I must pay them a visit some day—may I?—and the rookery too. How are the dear old crows?”

“Oh, I think there are more of them than ever now; they will be charmed to see you, I am sure.”

“I wish Tom could manage to have a rookery here. How is it done, Mr. Okedon?”

“Well, I’m sure I don’t know. They took up their abode in those old trees at

the bottom of the lawn heaven knows how long ago, and I don't suppose I could get rid of them now if I was dying to."

"How delightful. Tom, dear, couldn't you manage to get some crows to build in those trees along the avenue; it would be so charming?"

"Well, I don't exactly know how to go about it. If one could buy a few and force them to make nests and establish themselves there, no doubt it would be very nice," answered Tom from the head of the table, "but such things aren't to be done, I believe; eh, Charlie?"

"Hang them up in cages and don't give them too much grub, and I bet they'll caw pretty freely soon," suggested Captain Dashwood.

"What a horrid, cruel idea," murmured Fanny, with a little sigh.

"Why, they'd be very much jollier in comfortable little cages, with their beds made for them, and Lady Mary giving them their breakfasts every morning, than if they had to do it all for themselves; don't you think so?"

"No, indeed, I don't, and I shan't

allow any such cruelty here, Captain Dashwood."

"Why, what a little tyrant you are; you won't let anything be done anywhere without your leave, it seems."

"Nothing cruel or stupid, certainly."

"Oh, then I'm cruel and stupid, am I; thank you, Miss Foulkes, I shall remember that."

"I didn't say you were either, that I know of."

"You hinted as much; it's all the same."

"Very well, if you like to think so; I'm quite indifferent."

"We're beginning to get cross, are we? Well, women never can argue, I know."

"They can argue as well as men, I'm sure."

"Why, you know a woman's best argument is to leave the room and bang the door; isn't it so?"

"I don't know, I'm sure. I daresay some women would, but I always like to wait and fight the battle out."

"Well, then, let's begin. Here, what

was it all about? I forget, I'm sure."

"The crows, wasn't it?"

"Oh, yes, to be sure; whether the crows were more comfortable in cages or out of 'em—whether they liked having their breakfasts laid for 'em, or provided it for themselves—wasn't that it?"

"Yes, I suppose so."

"Well, I don't see how we're to settle the point without asking the birds themselves; eh, what do you say?"

What answer Miss Fanny might have made to this puzzling question I don't know, but just then Lady Mary gave that meaning glance to Miss Dashwood, made the little preliminary rustle, and the interesting little squabble at the side of the table had to be put an end to, and Miss Fanny tripped off at the end of a long string of ladies away from the decanters and glasses, the fruit and biscuits and gentlemen's society, out into the dark hall.

CHAPTER XV.

LIGHT AND SHADE.

AND how was that little blue-eyed girl down by the sea-shore getting on without her adoring dragoon all this time? She never thought, I am sure, that that young man wasn't letting the grass grow under his feet, was keeping his hand in practice, and was actually flirting with a very pretty merry young lady day after day. Two long days had passed since her handsome cavalier had paid the stone house a visit. Very long days they had seemed, but then they had been wet and windy ones, and there were no hansom cabs in Llanaber, in which the amorous young man might get a sit down on the stormy Green.

Miss Lily was too happy and believing in her new love to fancy that there was



anything wrong with this adorer of hers. She didn't know of the arrival of females at the Elms, or how bitter an enemy to all her dreams and hopes Lady Georgiana Dashwood was, and she was making and framing excuses upon excuses for this tardiness on the part of the Captain.

It was just ten o'clock, and the breakfast at No. 1, Queen's Terrace, was just over. Agnes, that grave little Martha of the family, who was troubled about many things, and did all the housekeeping in the Fremantle establishment, had slipped away to her duties, and that useless little person, Lily, was standing with her pretty little nose flattened against the window panes, looking out disconsolately into the rain and mist outside.

"Another wet day," she groaned; "another disgusting dull day. What shall I do, darling?"

"Do?" answered the person addressed as "darling," closing his favourite old book, and looking over smilingly at the idle figure in the window. "What do you want to do, little woman, eh?"

"Oh, if it was fine I should find plenty

to do. I could bathe, or walk, or sit in the castle, or amuse myself somehow, but I never know what to do with myself on a wet day ; it's disgusting !"

"Come over here and sit beside me, and read a couple of chapters of my sensible little book ; that would amuse you, I'm sure."

"And what is your book?" said Lily, coming over and perching herself on his knee. "Oh, thank you, no. There, shut it like a darling—it's a dull old stick of a thing—and tell me some of your old stories ; tell me about yourself, and your doings ; some old recollections—they're the nicest ;" and Miss Lily nestled against his shoulder, and stroked his long gray moustachios with that coaxing little hand of hers.

"Well, once on a time, when pigs were swine——. There, I can't tell stories if you stuff your fingers down my throat ; sit up straight and listen."

"Well?"

"Well, but I've told you those stories a dozen times before, child. I have no more old recollections for you ; I've told them all long ago."

“Then tell them over again; I’m never tired listening to them.”

“I don’t know where to begin, it’s such a long story—such a very long, long story,” and he sighed over the nestling head, and paused again. “So as I won’t tell stories, let us talk of something else. Where’s my little woman’s handsome cavalier all this time?”

“I don’t know.”

“You don’t know? Why, that’s a bad state of things;” and he patted and smoothed the golden curls fondly:

“I suppose he’ll come to-day, rain or no rain; and if he doesn’t, I shan’t break my heart—that’s all,” and Miss Lily laughed carelessly.

There was a pause, during which the fond old hands kept on stroking and patting the curly head, and Lily’s white fingers twisted themselves in and out of his heavy gold chain, and then the kind old voice spoke again.

“My little pet, are you quite sure that you do really love this Captain Dashwood, that you are fond enough of him to give up your old home to go and live always with

him in whatever home he can give you, without the comforts you have always been used to? Lily, my child, it is a very serious matter, and if you don't feel that he is more to you than any one else in the whole world, then, darling, don't be too rash in making yourself believe that you like him more than you really do, for if it's only a liking and friendship you feel for him, it's not enough, not half enough. Have you thought of this, my child?"

"Yes, yes, darling, I have thought of it all."

"And you are still determined to have him?"

"Yes, darling."

"Then, may God bless my little Lily, and send her a happy, happy home."

Lily only nestled nearer and closer to the strong, true heart, which was beating near hers then, and her fingers were still busy with the gold-linked chain.

"And I shall miss my little companion very, very much," he was saying. "I shall miss her in my walks, and the old house will seem very lonely and strange

without her; and she'll think sometimes of her old father—won't she?—of the old man, and their stories and chats together, and she'll miss him sometimes too. But he may come and see his little woman—mayn't he?—when she's in her new home, and she will be very happy, I'm sure—very, very happy. But she mustn't be a little goose; she mustn't be crying and whimpering about it. Why, Lily, what's all this about? You don't mean to say that you are really crying, you little silly thing?" and he was trying to raise the nestling head, which was only clinging closer and closer to him, and his kind old eyes were dim, and his voice trembled as he spoke.

"Why, what's the matter, my child? What's all this about?"

"It's—very unkind of you to talk like—that, and—and I shall stay with you always, darling, and never go away—never—oh, my darling," and those clinging arms, which seemed as if they had been made to hold and cling always to some one, were round his neck, and the fuzzy head was rubbing and brushing

against his face, and Lily—easily-moved, soft-hearted Lily—was having a good hearty cry on that friendly shoulder, and was feeling just then as she always did feel on very slight provocation, the most utterly miserable little girl in the world.

“But, my child, you are forgetting I have got Agnes still; you are not going to take her with you—are you? She’ll stay and take care of me—mayn’t she?—and look up and let me see you; I want to look at my little pet; and, Lily, you’re spoiling my grand new waistcoat with all those big salt tears. Come, let us talk of something cheerful. I didn’t know that your handsome captain could have made us both so foolishly unhappy. Why, I feel inclined to cry myself, just from listening to this ridiculous hullabaloo. I had no idea we should both be so easily moved. Don’t forget to tell him; I am sure it would be a very flattering piece of information to him. There—that’s it. Why, I declare you’re laughing at him now. Poor fellow, how sadly puzzled he would be, if he was to witness this little scene—wouldn’t he?”

“Yes ; but, darling——”

“Well, no buts about it, miss ; it’s a very great shame all this nonsense. Why, you foolish little puss, you’re the greatest little donkey I ever met, crying and whimpering and saying you wouldn’t have him at all, when you had just told me that you liked him better than anyone else in the world—oh, yes, of course, always excepting your old man, always excepting me, little woman, of course, I know that,” and he smiled down fondly on the troubled little face, which he was holding between his two hands ; “but you’re very fond of him too, aren’t you?”

“Yes, darling, but——”

“Well, I told you I would have no buts ; and I won’t talk on this subject any more, it’s too agitating a great deal ; and how’s the rain getting on ; won’t you let me get up and look out and see if I can’t see my old friends, the mountains. Oh yes, I declare it’s beginning to look quite clear over there ; isn’t it ?”

“Yes.”

“And I daresay we shall have a fine day after all.”

“I hope so.”

And they stood there side by side in the window, looking out into the mist and hazy view silently, and Miss Lily's big blue eyes were still a little tearful, and she was clinging still to the old man's arm.

“Darling?”

“Well.”

“Haven't you grown very fond of this quiet little place?”

“Very—it is one of those places that one would never grow tired of. There is a kind of romance in all its monotony, such peace and stillness, and such wonderful beauty about it, it's like a little fairy land, away from the world, and the bustle and noise; isn't it?”

“Yes, I have grown very fond of it even in the short time we have been here. I hope we shall come here next summer, darling.”

“Next summer's a long way off yet, and who knows where we may all be then, child? This may be the first and last visit our little paradise may ever have from us; life is too uncertain to allow of

of our taking much thought for the morrow, when we know not when or where our morrows may cease for ever."

"Well, but, darling, if we are all well and alive, I mean, of course."

"Oh, yes; but my little pet may be married then, and I don't think I should care to come here again without her."

They were silent again, and Lily's brain was busy thinking and pondering still, and they were looking out dreamily on that dismal view.

"How quickly the summer goes over. Why it seems only like yesterday that Agnes and I began to wear muslin dresses, and left off our warm coats, doesn't it?"

"Yes, but we're only in August now, though it does look so dark and dreary. Only the middle of August, and people don't put on their warm coats again till October; do they?"

"No, I suppose not; but even that's only six or seven weeks off after all."

"Yes, the winter creeps on us un-awares generally, and we are half way through it before we know where we are."

And those two relapsed again into silence, while the mist outside was growing lighter and clearer, and the thick rain was growing thinner and more misty, and it was beginning to look like a regular clear up; the sea was looking bluer and calmer, and it was a much clearer prospect upon which they were looking then than what it had been half an hour ago; and Lily's spirits were beginning to rise with the brightness, and her foolish tears were quite dried up now.

"I shall just go up and get my big water-proof coat, and then I shall go down to the bathing-place, and have a good dip; what do you think, sir?" and Miss Lily's cheek was rubbing and brushing his again.

"Very well, little woman, run."

"And—and, darling, tell me, just once, that you are glad I am going to marry Jack—that you like him, and——"

"Why, my child, if you are happy so am I; and I shall be sure to like him in time. I haven't seen enough of him as yet, you know."

"Yes, that's what I mean," murmured

Lily, softly, and wondering why everyone couldn't see that handsome hero with her eyes, and feel the same admiration and devotion for him as she did.

"So my little woman may make herself quite happy about it, and take her dip with a light heart."

"Then good-bye, you darling old man."

"Good-bye, and God bless my little Lily."

And more hugging and fondling, and then that sadly, over-indulged young lady tripped off to equip herself for the bathing expedition, leaving the old man still looking out into the mist and rain alone, hearing still that young voice in his ear, and feeling the touch of the fond little hand on his arm.

Every word spoken by her young voice now was a treasure to him—every touch of her soft little hand thrilled him as it had never done before, and every look in her bright young face brought back a dream of another fairer face which had made the world look bright and warm for him long ago—a face which was now only

a picture face—a fair dream face treasured up in his heart.

We each have our own little separate world of fancy, a little separate sphere of our own, in which our "hermit hearts" can stay alone, and into the sanctum of which no prying eyes can ever peep. Each in this little world of his has his own separate thoughts and memories—memories of "the long ago," of smiles and words, and young bright faces, which once had made this cold dark world of ours such a Paradise—young faces, on which we may never look again, except in dreams—picture faces, on which no one else can look, and the door to this little secret heart-world is in our own keeping, and all the treasures and joys gleaned through life are hidden and stored away there. The kind words and voices, the young forms and faces, the meetings and the partings, the sorrows, and the joys, all mingle together there, and no one else can see those dream pictures but ourselves.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE WHY AND THE WHEREFORE.

THAT interview which Captain Dashwood had had with his invalid mother, on the evening after the little croquet party at the Elms, had been a very lengthy and exciting one; there had been vain entreaties and upbraidings, in answer to which the Captain had lost his temper, had held to his former resolution, and was very much angered by those wild reproachful speeches, and the interview had terminated in a very undecided, uncertain way. Lady Georgiana had been stern and earnest at first, had talked and pleaded to that reckless young man with her whole heart, with the picture of this hopeless business before her, and Caroline's parting counselling words still in her ear. But it wasn't in her ladyship's nature to

be consistent for very long together ; and there had been the usual making up and play of waterworks—an undecided making up, in which both had confessed themselves in the wrong, and in which neither was willing to give up his or her wrong opinion or resolution, and so parted as they always did, reconciled and yet not satisfied.

Lady Georgiana was still determined to frown on this absurd love-match, still determined to protect her boy against this new evil if possible ; and her boy was also determined to hold his own against those protests and entreaties, to hold to his new love steadfastly still. He had half won the great battle already ; he had brought his weak-minded old mother to say that there should be no breach between them, even should the love-match come off ; he had made her say that he should be her darling still ; that no sin, however great or wild, should ever be unpardonable in him, that she couldn't banish him from her presence, or bid him be no more the light of her eyes, the one great treasure of her heart.

In a weak moment all this had been confessed—in a foolish moment Captain Dashwood had been made aware that he was all in all to that fond mother, that it wasn't in her power to hold anything from him, which he might see fit to demand of her, or to bid him give up any whim or fancy no matter how wild or unreasonable; and so that very odd conversation had terminated as all their other conversations and disputes had always terminated, leaving Jack the victor; and bathed in those fond forgiving tears, he had descended to the drawing-room on that evening, had been unusually pleasant, and gay among the young ladies assembled there; he had been chatty and friendly to Caroline, and kind and patronizing to his younger sisters; he had talked to Tom very warmly about his horses and dogs, and had quite won the owner of the mare's good opinion by announcing his opinion that the animal was one of the handsomest and best in the United Kingdom, and was worth her weight in gold. But he had rather avoided picking any new quarrels, or entering into any

disputes with the pretty black-eyed young lady who had occupied so much of his attention at dinner, and he had taken his leave rather early ; and he and Charlie rode off down the long avenue in the moonlight, leaving the cheerful faces and bright lights at the Elms behind them, very contentedly.

“Foulkes has asked us to come over in the morning and shoot over the covers,” said the Captain, as they rode on down the hill ; “and we may as well go ; what do you say ?”

“Yes, if you like. You won’t get much sport I am afraid,” answered Charlie.

“Why ?”

“Why, because, there’s nothing to shoot ; that’s all.”

“Well, there’s nothing else to be done, so I said I’d go.”

“What time ?”

“Ten, or half-past. Will you come ?”

“No ; I couldn’t go to-morrow, I think.”

“Why not ?”

“Well, I’ve got the rest of the hay to

get in ; I'm afraid of it coming on to rain before we have it done."

"What a nuisance it must be to be a farmer."

"Why?"

"Why, because you've got such a devilish lot to do about the place ; there are sheep to be clipped one day, pigs to be killed another, and hay to be taken in, and fields to be ploughed, and the deuce knows what more besides. It must be an awful nuisance to have to overlook everything like that."

"Well, but my good fellow, if I wasn't to overlook everything, why the place wouldn't be worth a whistle in a couple of years."

"I know ; that's just why I shouldn't like to be a landowner."

"You'd get to like it if you had a place of your own to take an interest in."

"Oh, I daresay ; I have no doubt I should after a short time ; I should most likely be raving about fat cows and pigs, in a couple of years, and contrive to concentrate all my hopes and affections in

my fat and lean kine, and turnips and potatoes; but at present I can hardly imagine it."

"Of course you can't; and I can hardly imagine living your life, your comfortable easy life, smoking your cigar and eating your dinner, and idling away your days in a barrack room, with no objects and no interests beyond what are contained for you in *Bell's Life*, and Tattersall's advertisements. It's just as inexplicable to me how you manage to go on in your lazy fashionable way, as it is to you how I contrive to live half my life here all alone with my pigs and turnips, and never wish for better company."

"Ah! that's all you know about it. Smoke cigars and read *Bell's Life* all day, indeed! And who looks after the duties and guards, I should like to know? We haven't such quiet lives I can tell you; there's a deuced deal more to be done in the service than you think."

"Oh, I daresay, I don't know much about it, but don't let's quarrel about our different lots. We're each satisfied with our own condition, and don't want to



alter it : so that's a comfortable state of things, at least ; and we can enjoy our different lives equally too."

"Yes, I'm tolerably satisfied with mine, and don't want to change with anyone just yet ; but, you know, I'm going to sell out now."

"Sell out ! Why, what on earth is that for ?"

"Well, you know, as I'm going to be married, I've been thinking that perhaps, as I'm not particularly well off just at present, it would be better to leave the service and set up house on an economical scale somewhere in town—it's so confoundedly expensive keeping pace with some of those snobs in ours, and a fellow gets so sat upon if he doesn't keep up to them. Why, look at me, now ; I have to keep my three hunters, separate from my chargers and all that, and drive a trap of course, tandem, too, sometimes. That kind of thing runs a fellow pretty tight after a time ; unless he's as rich as Croesus, or something, he can't stand it long."

"But I cannot understand, Jack,

why you should keep the three hunters and—”

“Well, don’t you see, it’s not absolutely necessary that I should do all that; but if a fellow wants to keep his place in his regiment, hang it, he must pay for it, and handsomely too.”

“Well, then, you mean to sell out and retrench—is that it?”

“Yes.”

“What sell the hunters, and chargers, and traps, and all?”

“Well, not at all, of course; the chargers—they’ll be no use to me then—and two of the hunters, that is, if I can get the right prices for them; I wouldn’t sell either of them under a hundred—and twenty; then I can see about the others after.”

“I tell you what, Jack, I see pretty clearly that the hunters and their owner will never part company so easily, and Captain Dashwood out of the service will be just as expensive a person as Captain Dashwood in it—perhaps, more so, when he’s a married man.”

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“No; I tell you I’m determined to retrench as soon as I’m spliced—I swear I will; and I’d sell two of the hunters tomorrow if I got a fair price for them.”

“Well, of course, you know best how to manage your own affairs, Jack; but two hundred a year is very little to keep house on comfortably, much less to pay for three hunters, and——”

“Why, don’t I tell you I’m going to sell two of them at once.”

“Well, if you really mean to, it’s all right, and of course it’s no affair of mine; but I know you won’t be angry with me, Jack, if I say that I should feel easier about you and your prospects, if I could know that those two beasts were disposed of, or on a fair way to be so.”

“Yes, I’m sure you’re right, old fellow, and I’m the greatest fool that ever lived, and—and, Charlie, I have more reliance on your opinion and advice than anyone else’s, and I’m always obliged to you for any hints or suggestions you may give me, old fellow; it’s very good of you to think of me and my embarrassments at all, and—and I’ll take your advice about the

horses—I will, indeed. I think you're right as you always are. I'll write up to town to-morrow about them; I know a fellow there who could get me good prices for them any day, and I'll write to him—I will, indeed. You're right; I couldn't do it—two hundred a year is so deuced little; I couldn't do it at all."

"Yes, and it's best to begin at once, if you're thinking of marrying soon, that is."

"Well, I don't know what you may call soon, but within the year I hope."

They had been walking their horses all this time in the moonlight, along the long low road by the sea, and the rippling and plashing of the little waves came stealing up among the rocks below them, making very quiet, soothing music for those two horsemen riding there; and the moonlight fell tranquilly and brightly on a long line of white road stretching away before them—fell clearly and softly on the calm dim sea, making the little ripples all silver and glistening in its clear cold light.

They had lapsed into silence now, and were quietly ascending the steep hill, and



leaving the moonlit waves and silver sea behind them as they rode slowly on. Captain Jack had lit his everlasting cigar, and had grown morose and thoughtful under the soothing influence of the mild tobacco; and Charlie was silent too; and that rippling, plashing sound fell very sadly on his ear, and roused very vague, sad thoughts in his heart—thoughts of a lonely, unloved life, of an unrequited, hopeless love, and devotion—thoughts which were often swelling there now—which brought no hope or light with them, and only made that strong heart very despairing and lonely; and he rode on beside his friend, in the still night air, with his solitary thoughts far away, wandering in that heart-world of his, among the cherished images there, and thinking of one fair, grave, young face, with earnest eyes and a pensive shade over it, thinking of it and none other, and the picture faces in this world of dreams were all different types of that one young face—some smiling, some sad; but the light and brightness all grew dark and black as he gazed on this one picture in his heart, and saw

it only, saw it clear and bright, amid the darkness and blankness there—the one light amid all the darkness—the one fair, light spot in that world of blank hopelessness; and he didn't try to shut his eyes on that picture of his; he didn't try to push it out of its place in his heart; he let it stay there, lighting him still, as it was to light him through all his life for ever.

And all the time that same grave young lady had her own private little picture gallery, in which she too had her favourite picture face—a kind, honest young face, with a soft smiling mouth and clear eyes—a face which bore a character written on it, a fair open character, and honest true life; and on this same picture face, she, too, was wont to gaze at times, sadly and thoughtfully, but she didn't allow herself often to indulge in this day-dreaming; she was trying to shut her eyes on the intruding image, trying to push it from its place in her picture gallery and cast it out altogether, but it wouldn't go; it wouldn't grow dim or fade, it was still there, bright and clear as ever, and all that shutting of eyes was of no avail, wouldn't keep the



light from stealing in, or the knowledge of how dear it had become to her, grow less distinct and sure.

On, and on, slowly, these two men rode side by side, on that clear moonlight road; the Captain was still puffing away at his cigar, and meditating, too. He liked confiding in his friend, and getting advice and encouragement from him. Charlie was so clear-sighted and sensible, so full of good common sense and judgment, that he could make and plan out a whole life if he liked. He had pulled down and swept away those dream-castles of his friend's at once; but if he had, he had built him others of stronger, more durable stuff, and had raised up hopes where there had been blankness; had given new interests to that far-off time—new and better interests; and had made new hopes and plans for him, if he chose to take them to himself and build upon them, and the Captain was building on them as he rode along there in the moonlight.

He was looking on things as they were, not as he had chosen to look on them before; he was planning on his two

hundred a year very sensibly and clearly, not as he had planned before. Those extravagant plans were all thrown aside now, and forgotten, and new and better ones had taken their place, and Captain Jack felt very thankful and grateful to his friend for all the trouble and interest he had taken in his affairs.

And Charlie did feel a great interest in his friend's plans and hopes; he had always taken an interest in that handsome young scamp; there had always been something to like and admire in him, Charlie thought—always some good concealed behind a coating of conceit and laziness, and Charlie had always seen the goodness shining through the good-for-nothingness, had always appreciated it, and had shut his eyes persistently to all the faults and imperfections, through all the years in which he and Jack had been friends together. Long ago in those old school-days, how he had admired and imitated the brilliant good-for-nothing young fellow; how he had envied him his graceful, winning manners, and handsome face; how nothing he ever did had seemed

bad or foolish in his friend's eyes, and what a splendid reckless young fool this same Jack Dashwood had always been—all this he remembered now: the games of football in which that young gentleman had lost his temper so unaccountably, and displayed so much hot-headed spirit, the cricket matches in which the same Jack Dashwood had made his small scores so gracefully and brilliantly, and had gone out so sulkily and angrily;—all this Charlie remembered now, all the old games and troubles together.

Things had changed since then, and Jack wasn't such a hero now at all; Charlie had come to see that those brilliant, reckless qualities in a man, were not half so becoming as in a school-boy; that the hot temper and vanity were qualities not likely to win admiration and respect now, as they had done in the boy, and that the world didn't look half so kindly on the useless young man's faults as it had done long ago on the boy's faults, and Jack Dashwood now, was a very uninteresting person compared with the Jack Dashwood of

long ago. Charlie had got more sense since then, and was able to see the faults in this imperfect hero of his, able to see them all, and tremble for them, for the terrible disproportion of good to bad—the uneven balance between right and wrong; but still it wasn't all wrong, that he saw there; there was yet some of the old boyish generosity and brightness left, and Charlie thought that his friend was still almost a hero, almost as great a fellow as in those school-days when he had been such a young swell in his "house," such a person to be admired and imitated, and he liked planning and sketching out a new life for his hero, a new better life, with hopes and schemes which were worthy of him, and he gave all that advice and encouragement from a sincere heart, and with a believing hope, that he would one day see the misjudged young man done justice to, and all his good true qualities drawn out and developed.

"Jack," he said, interrupting that long silence, and turning round on the Captain, "when are you going to be married, Jack?"

“Well, I don’t exactly know,” answered the Captain, removing the cigar from his mouth and stooping to pat his horse’s neck; “you see I have my affairs to get into order yet. But why do you ask?”

“Oh, I only wanted to know; I shall be very glad to see you married, Jack.”

“Thank you, old fellow; it’s very kind of you to say so.”

“Yes, I shall indeed, I think it will be the making of you; you only wanted some one to keep you in order, and help and advise you how to manage and spend that income of yours right.”

“Well, I hope she will prove as great a manager as you seem to think; but I’m afraid my poor little Lily is hardly strong-minded enough to become such a little termagant all at once, as to be able to keep such a good-for-nothing boy as I am always in the way he should go. I’m greatly afraid my little wife will be inclined to give me too much of my own way, to be quite good for me. No, no, Charlie, there will be no keeping in order, or bullying I’m sure.”

"How do you know? She may turn out a regular little shrew."

"Well, even if she does, why I must only try if I can't tame her."

"A pleasant process that, I should say."

"Better than doing the henpecked dodge; all the same; it's just a toss up between the two."

"Yes, I suppose so; but really, joking apart, I should think you will get on capitally together. I am sure she has a good temper. You have only to look in her face and see it there."

"Yes, we are pretty sure of trotting on well together."

"It will be your fault if you don't, I'm sure."

"And you don't know when it's to be?"

"As soon as I can, you may depend."

"Well, I only ask, because I don't approve of long engagements. 'If 'tis done, when 'tis done, then 'twere well 'twere done quickly;' isn't it so?"

"Yes, if you choose to liken matrimony to a murder; not otherwise."

“Well, so it is a murder in one sense—the murder of all your freedom, and all that kind of thing, you know.”

“A very lame argument, Mr. Charles, and unworthy of you, sir. Why you’ve just been lauding my intentions to the skies, and drawing all kinds of delightful spooney domestic scenes. You’re very inconsistent, sir.”

“Well, I suppose I’m a bad philosopher; I never could argue.”

“So much the better; I never could either. I always lose my temper over an argument, it’s such a confoundedly irritating thing.”

“Yes, horrid; and yet if there hadn’t been arguments, and sturdy old philosophers gifted with sublimely even tempers, how much more in the dark we should all be on thousands of subjects?”

“I suppose so; it’s bread and wine to some men, but ‘one man’s meat is another man’s poison,’ you know, and I never could enjoy an argument.”

“No more could I; but I say, here, which way do we go? Look out, old fellow, you’re riding into a ditch.”

And Captain Dashwood came to a halt in the road, where another narrower road branched off.

"Oh yes, to be sure," cried Charlie, "why I declare I should have broken my nose against old Dalton's stone wall, in another minute; I'm wool-gathering I think, and the moon has hid her light in a most unmeaning manner; I can hardly see. Come on down here."

"Yes, it has got devilish dark all at once; I don't know how the deuce we shall ever make our way along these lanes and places."

"Oh, come along; I ought to know my way by this time; I won't lead you into a bog or ditch, I assure you."

"I'm not so sure about that; I think only for me just now, we should have come to grief against old what-do-you-call-him's stone wall. I'm afraid it's only the blind leading the blind, and that we shall wind up in a ditch."

"Well, I hope not; but come along anyhow."

And these two gentlemen rode down that narrow lane slowly on and on in the

dark night air, with the Captain's cigar top making a little red star in the dark, and the sound of the horses' hoofs making a clear ringing on the hard road. It wasn't a long lane, and came to an end very quickly; and they found themselves close to the Beaumanoir gate.

"We have walked the whole way I declare," said Charlie, as they made their way up the dark avenue among the trees.

"Yes, you were determined to save your horses, upon my word," answered Jack, yawning; "we've been out half the night, I'm sure."

"Well, I think we ought to thank our stars, that we weren't going at a full swinging trot when I went at Dalton's wall just now. I hardly think the mare could have taken it."

"You would have been in a neat fix if you had got over. It's a turnip field at the other side, isn't it?"

"Yes, and a good big one, too, with a prospect of Dalton and a pitchfork into the bargain the other side."

"I should have tried if I couldn't

manage to light on his head, and shut him up."

"It would have been a very neat shave, not to have descended on the pitchfork instead, and shut yourself up. But here we are at last, safe and sound."

And, so having reached their destination, the two travellers alighted, and passed into the red brick house. And the moonlight fell on the pale monthly roses, and touched the clustering ivy leaves, and lay on the green slope and terrace walk peacefully. And the faint night breeze stirred the tree tops, and whispered among the thick limes and ashes in the avenue, and all things seemed at peace in that quiet old place, and the little twinkling lights in the casement windows up above went out one by one, and silence and stillness fell over all, and another day had faded into night, another sun had risen and set since Captain Dashwood had seen the little blue-eyed girl, to whom he had plighted his troth in the rain and wind in that little railway shed, so very, very lately; and that same moon which was casting its rays down on the

trees and flowers at the Manoir, was shining too on the cold stone terrace by the sea, shining on the window panes of that very little blue-eyed girl's bed-room window, and the same faint breeze was whispering round the tall gaunt chimneys there, and stirring the tops of the big trees down in the Castle walk, and make them wave and sigh just as it was doing to those other trees, and silence and peace was there also.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.



